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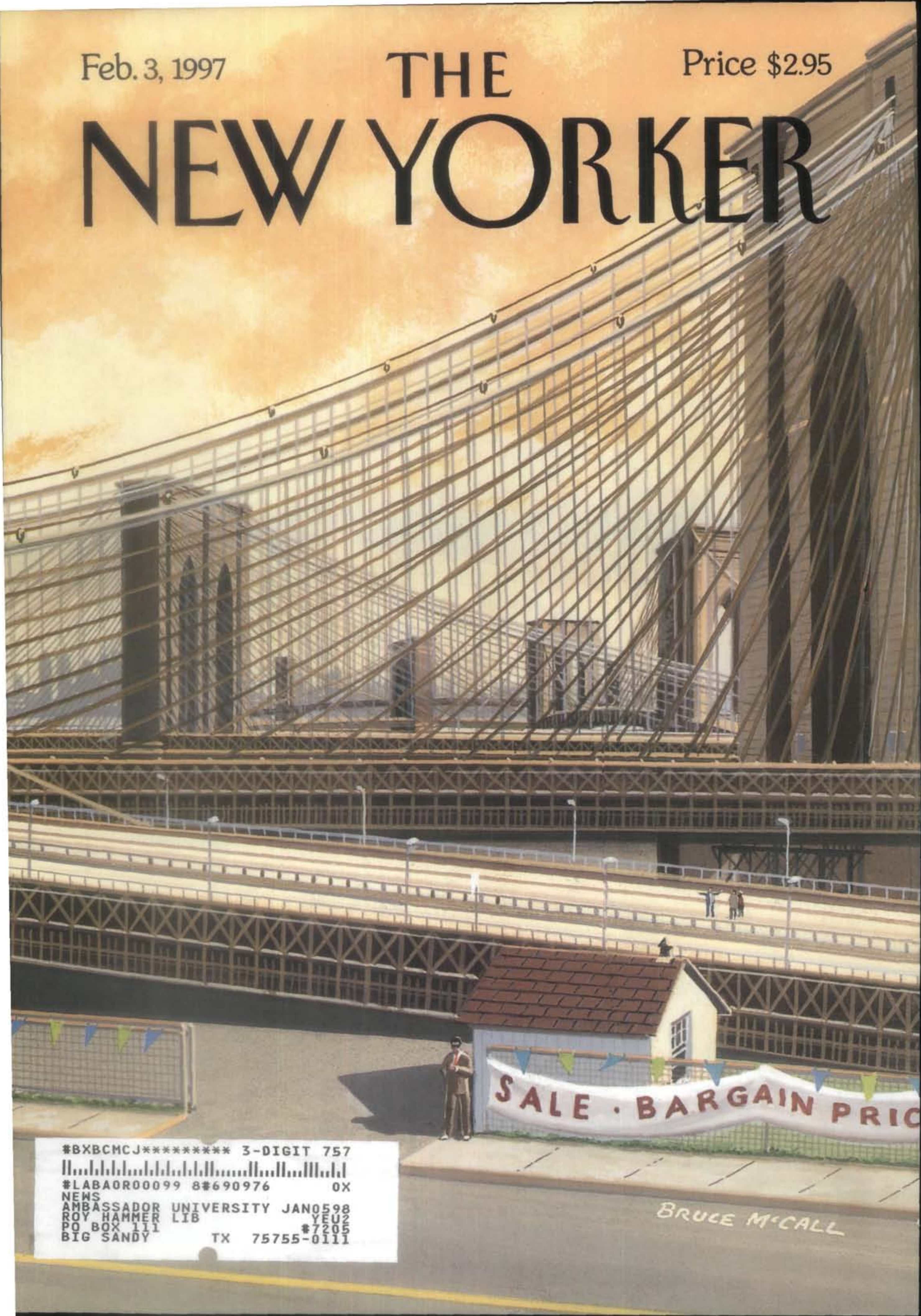
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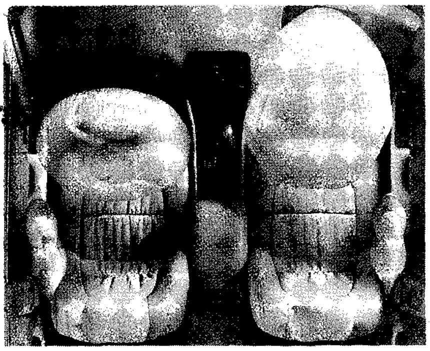

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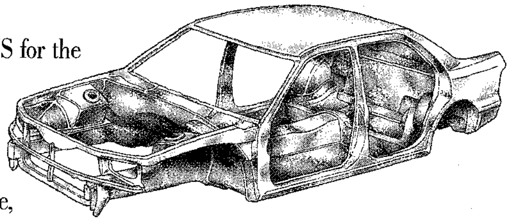

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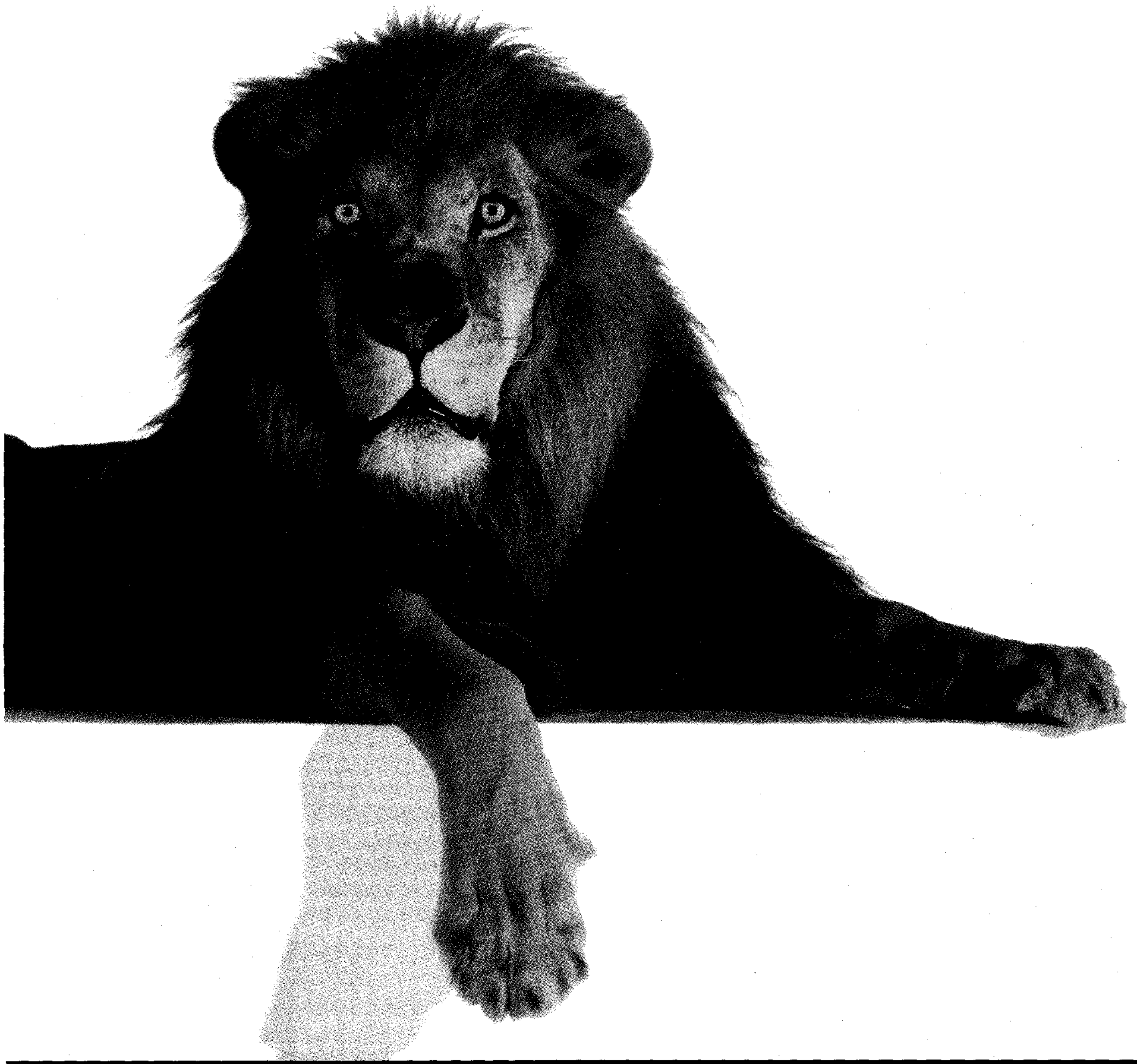

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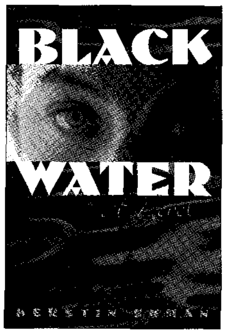

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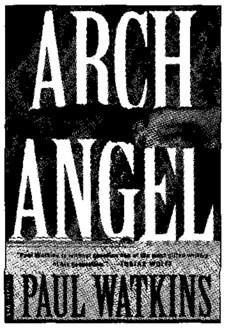

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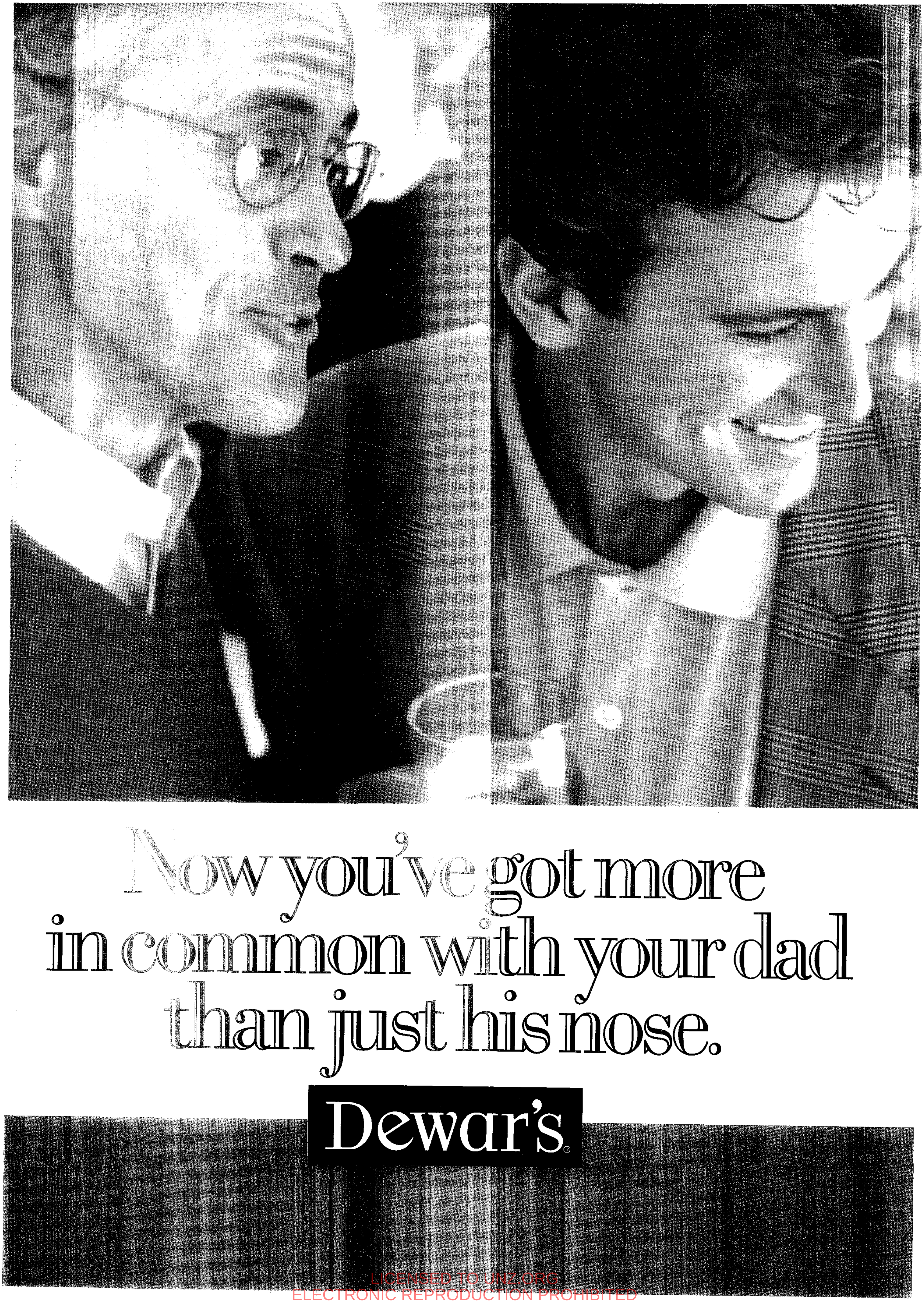
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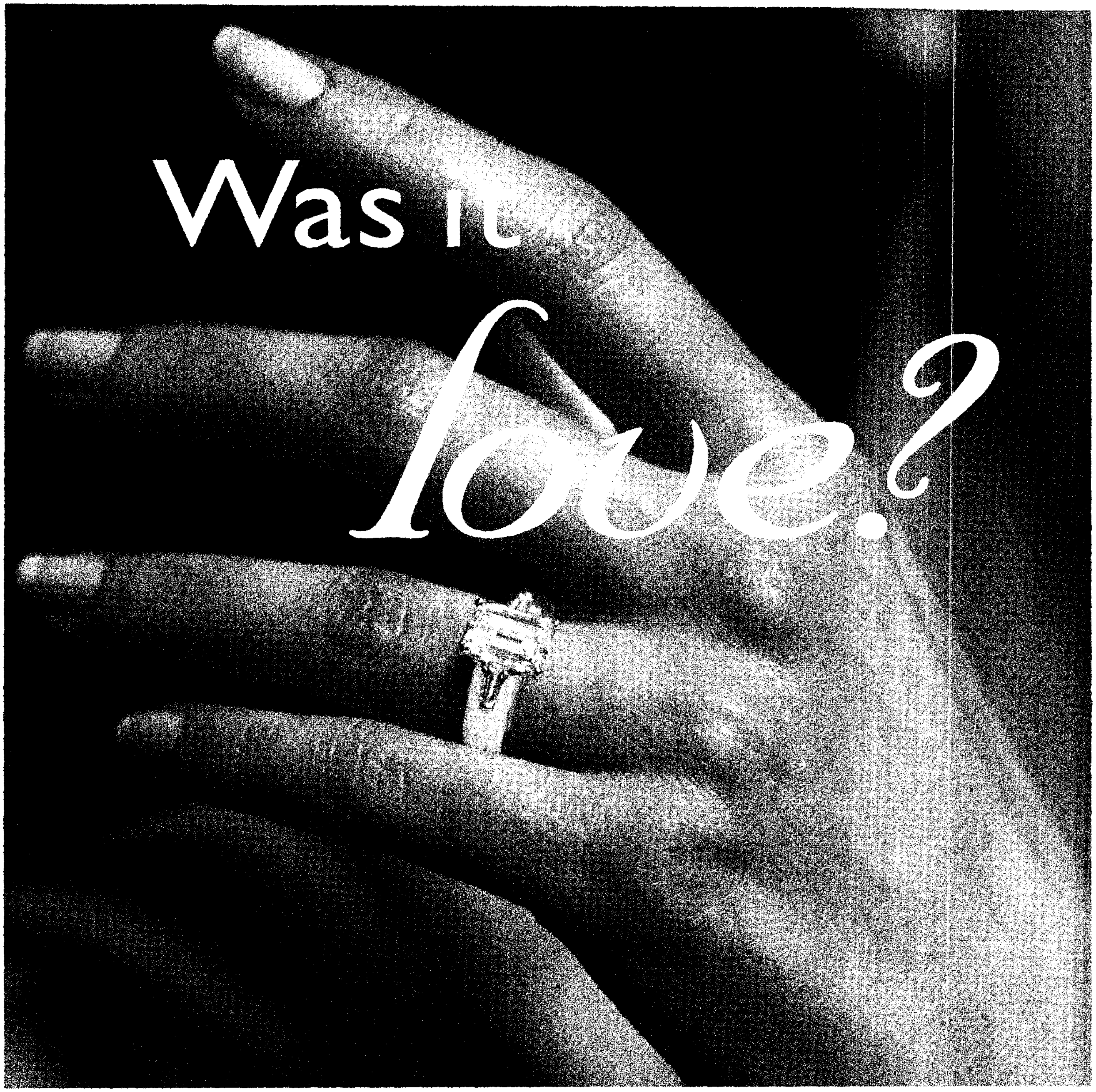

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COMMENT

THE ERA OF SOUR FEELINGS

The "vital center" is a resultant, not a consensus.

PRESIDENTS are supposed to be optimistic (in Ronald Reagan's blurry afterglow, the penalty for political frowning remains political death), and a President on the cusp of a second term has every incentive to put on a happy face: times must be good and getting better—if they aren't, whose fault might that be? Throw in peace, prosperity, and the irresistible numerology of a calendrical odometer about to turn over, and it's no wonder that the incumbent—William Jefferson Clinton for a day, but still our Bill—opened his speech last week by proclaiming, "It is our great good fortune that time and chance have put us not only at the edge of a new century in a new millennium, but on the edge of a bright new prospect in human affairs."

In saying that "we have resolved for our time a great debate over the role of government," Clinton sought to define the present as a period of consensus—almost an Era of Good Feelings. "Today we can declare government is not the problem and government is not the solution," he explained. "We, the American people—we are the solution." Thus did he place himself in the tiny space that passes for the center—somewhere between Reagan's "Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem" and Jimmy Carter's "Government cannot solve our problems. . . . Only a true partnership between government and the people" can do that.

In one sense, Clinton is right that the "role of government" debate is over: after a century of total war, hot and cold, the argument about how the societies of the West should be organized has been settled in favor of a loose association of commercial republics that choose their governments through contested elections based on universal suffrage. It is wonderful indeed that, as Clinton noted, "for the very first time in all of history, more people on this planet live under democracy than dictatorship"—an assertion startling enough for the *Times* to assign a reporter to check it out. (He concluded that "yes, Mr. Clinton is correct.") But in the United States democracy has not been a controversial proposition for a long time. And there is little reason to suppose that what Clinton has lately been calling (in a phrase borrowed from an indignant Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.) "the vital center" has much vitality.

"The American people returned to office a President of one party and a Congress of another," Clinton said, adding, in his most successful applause line, "Surely they did not do this to advance

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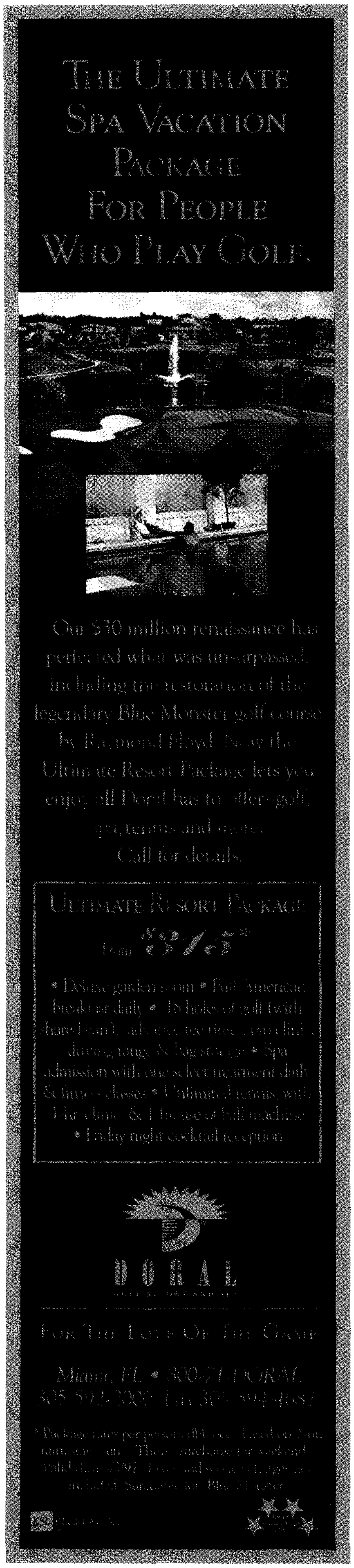

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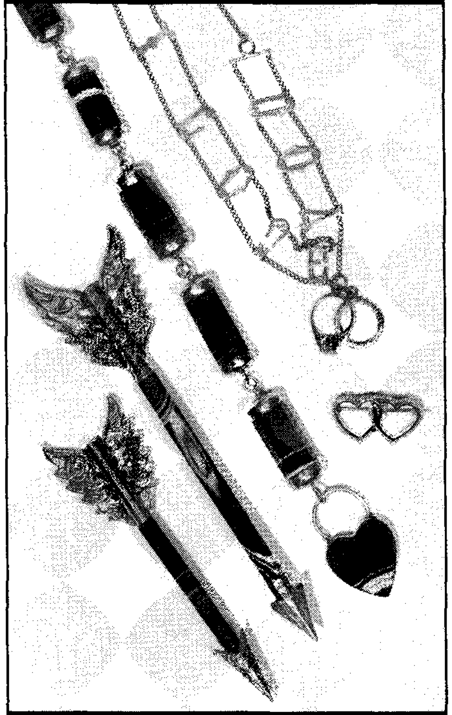

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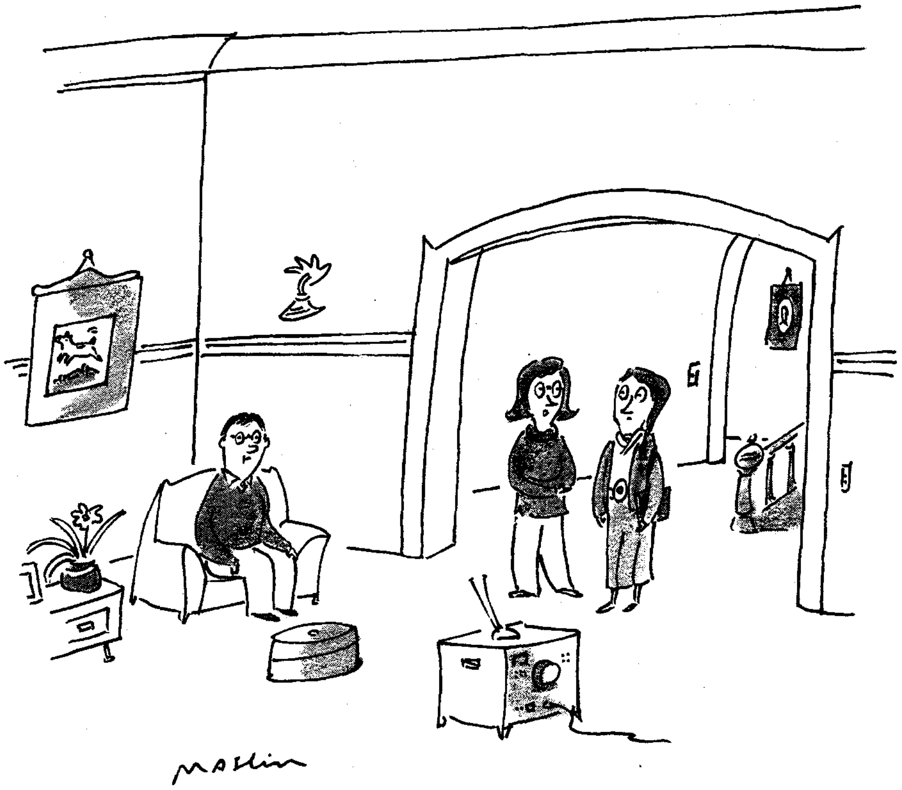
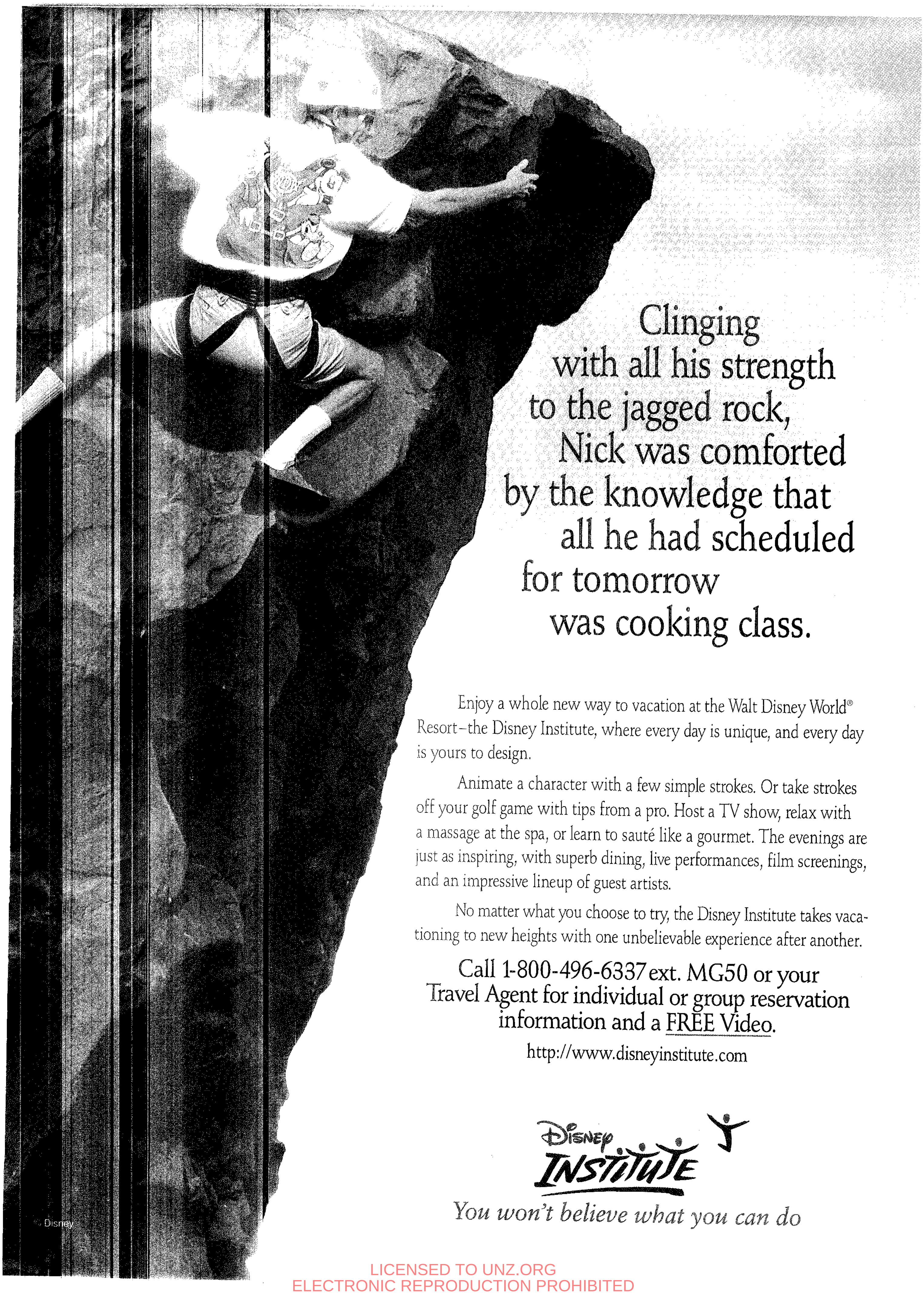


"I'm taking no extraordinary measures to keep him alive."

the politics of petty bickering and extreme partisanship they plainly deplore." But the assumption, which is far from Clinton's alone, that "the American people" *chose* divided government, let alone that they did so for a particular purpose, comes close to being an example of the pathetic fallacy. (Your people, Sir, is a mythical beast.) In fact, according to exit polls, four out of five voters supported candidates of the same party for President and the House of Representatives. Some eighty per cent of the electorate, in other words, explicitly voted *against* divided government. And even among those who voted for it, a minority picked the particular combination we ended up with—a Democratic President and a Republican Congress.

It's natural for Clinton to detect a popular mandate for centrism: this is a President who likes to *do* things (he is a great one for believing that half a Big Mac is better than none), and he evidently sees no alternative to bipartisanship except inaction. And he is probably right that most people, given the cards that our cumbersome, fragmented electoral system has dealt them, are hoping for coöperation between the branches of government. But none of this should be mistaken for vitality at the center. To the extent that the public is willing to settle for some sort of vaguely defined centrism, that willingness is an expression not of consensus but of exhaustion and resignation. William Jefferson Clinton talked last week of bipartisanship, but Bill Clinton, however beleaguered, is still a Democrat. His long tactical retreat may look like a full-scale rout, but so did General Kutuzov's. On Capitol Hill, thanks to the generation-long culling of Southern Democrats and moderate Republicans, the congressional parties are more polarized than they've been since the nineteen-thirties (a development loudly deplored by many who used to complain that the parties didn't stand for anything). Opinion polls show that the electorate, too, is deeply divided. On average, New York and Los Angeles are in Kansas, but that doesn't put either of them in flyover country. The center that Clinton touts is a mathematical resultant, not a functioning consensus. If many citizens, a little wanly, now put their hope in it, that may be because the alternative—that the system itself is increasingly incapable of anything beyond bickering, partisanship, and stasis—is so disheartening. —HENDRIK HERTZBERG



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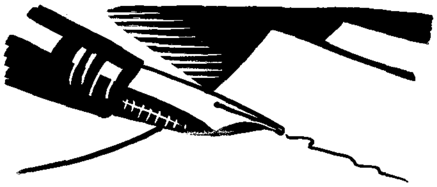

DETERMINED GENES?

Louis Menand's entertaining Comment on the genetics of anxiety ("The Gods Are Anxious," December 16th) seems wise, but Menand errs on the underlying science. Consider a simple analogy: A scientist reports that people with genes for pale, freckled skin inherit a proneness to sunburn, and an essayist wonders with sarcastic wit how anyone could be so naïve as to imagine that genes, rather than sun exposure, cause burned skin. The essayist is confusing a genetic tendency toward an effect with the genes' actually causing that effect. This confusion underlies the idea that genetic contributions to traits such as anxiety necessarily lead to determinism. In fact, the opposite can also be true. To continue the analogy: When people who inherit fair skin understand their increased genetic risk of sunburn and skin cancer, they typically show greater motivation to avoid sun exposure. In a similar way, a deeper understanding of the genetic contributions to anxiety may lead to new opportunities for preventing some psychiatric disorders in high-risk individuals. Public confusion on these issues undermines such efforts.

RONALD DAHL, M.D.
Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center
Pittsburgh, Pa.

SANDSTORM

Wade Graham's "Beachless" (Our Far-Flung Correspondents, December 16th), about the United States Army Corps of Engineers' beach-nourishment projects, did not note that over the past forty-five years federal and non-federal expenditures on such projects have amounted to only seven hundred and thirty million dollars, or that we recommend investing only where a project's benefits exceed its cost. Projects are justified primarily on the basis of reduced property damage, but beach tourism also generates considerable revenue, for the local economy and for the state and federal treasuries. Further, by reducing hurricane and storm damage, projects have reduced federal disaster-assistance payments. A recent report by a National Research Council committee, which was composed of many highly respected coastal-engineering experts, found our design principles reasonable, and even recommended that we publish comprehensive guidelines on the design of beach-nourishment projects.

H. MARTIN LANCASTER
Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
Washington, D.C.

There is a great deal of controversy over beach nourishment, but one thing is certain: man has displayed arrogance in trying to control nature. The primary goal of many nourishment projects is to counter the effects of past human intervention and return coastal ecosystems to a more natural condition. Perhaps both sides in the debate can agree that a Hippocratic oath for protecting the coast is called for: First, do no harm.

JANE EKSTEIN
Executive Director, Save Our Seashore
Brightwaters, N.Y.

THE GOOD BOOK

Anyone who has ever spent time with Fowler's "Modern English Usage" has a favorite listing. As I read John Updike's review of the new edition (Books, December 23rd & 30th), I kept waiting for him to mention mine, "in so far," which begins, "He must have a long spoon that sups with the devil; and the safest way of dealing with *in so far* is to keep clear of it." This epitomizes what the book has always been for me: a practical and highly entertaining road map for the English language. I wouldn't begrudge you the new edition—more aptly entitled "Post-Modern English Usage"—but I would advise taking along a certain elongated eating utensil.

G. A. DONOVAN
Cambridge, Mass.

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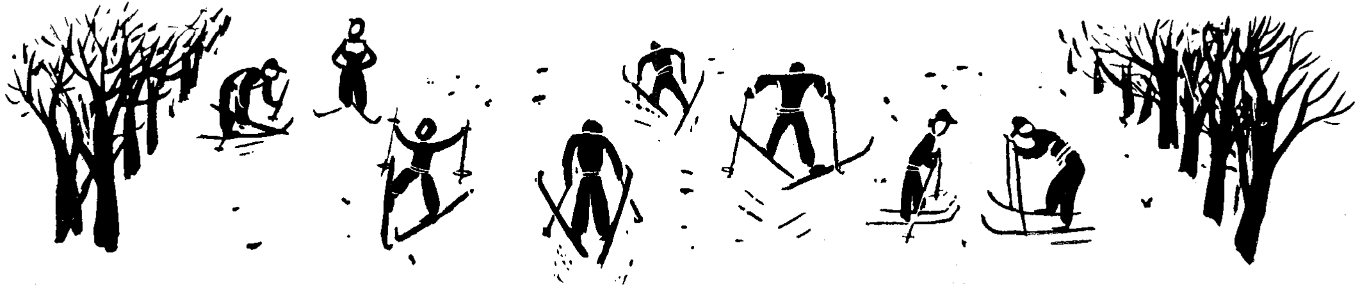
GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



THE THEATRE

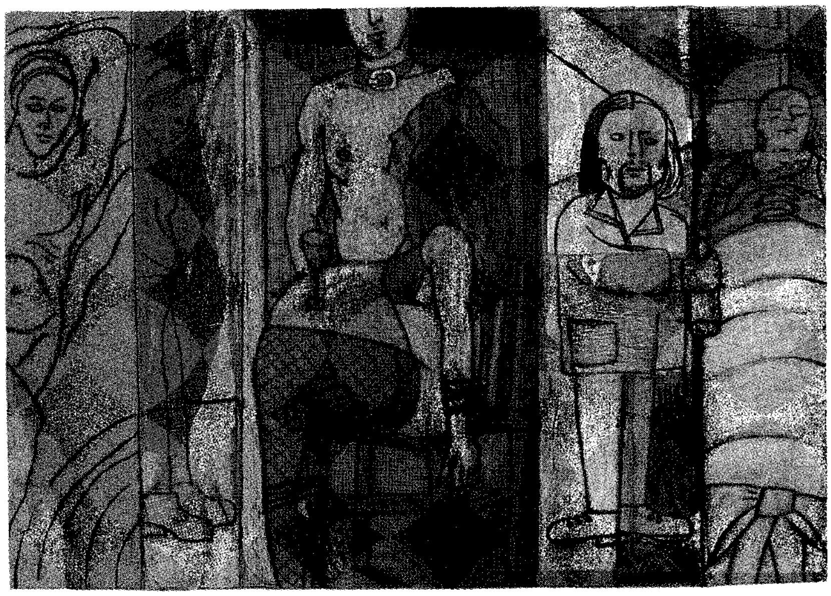
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Boychik—A new comedy-drama by Richard Krevolin, starring Richard Kline as a middle-aged Jewish man dealing with the death of his father. In previews. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

Brother Malcolm X—In a brief engagement of Frank G. Greenwood's 1978 play, Duane Shepard portrays the black militant and twenty-three other characters. Jan. 29-Feb. 1 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 3. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

Dreamstuff—A new musical based on the Aladdin tale but updated to the nineteen-nineties, starring Carol Woods, Louise DuArt, and Aileen Quinn, with music and lyrics by Sal Lombarde and book by John Pantozzi. In previews. (Samuel Beckett, 412 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.)



"Marking," by actor turned playwright Patrick Breen.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

The Flatted Fifth—From the New Group, a new play by Seth Zvi Rosenfeld about multicultural relationships. Danny Hoch, Sarita Choudhury, and Nicole Parker are in the cast. Directed by Jo Bonney. Previews begin Jan. 31. (INTAR, 420 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Minutes from the Blue Route—Elizabeth Franz, Catherine Kellner, Matt McGrath, and Stephen Mendillo star in Tom Donaghy's family drama, directed by David Warren. Preview on Jan. 29. Opens Jan. 30 at 8. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

Peter and Wendy—The experimental theatre troupe Mabou Mines' interpretation of J. M. Barrie's tale about the boy who wouldn't grow up and the girl who loved him features Bunraku puppets and Celtic music. Directed by Lee Breuer. Previews begin Feb. 1. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

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2	3	4	29	30	31	1

Psychopathia Sexualis—John Patrick Shanley's new comedy, about a man with a fetish, stars Daniel Jerroll. Daniel Sullivan is the director. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Signature Theatre Company—The Sam Shepard season continues with three one-acts directed by Darrell Larson: "The Sad Lament of Pecos Bill on the Eve of Killing His Wife," "Killer's Head," and "Action." In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 239-6200.)

Three Sisters—Amy Irving, Lili Taylor, and Jeanne Tripplehorn are Chekhov's trio and Billy Crudup, Eric Stoltz, and David Strathairn their suitors, in a Roundabout Theatre staging directed by Scott Elliott. In previews. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Venice Preserv'd—Up next for the Pearl Theatre Company is Thomas Otway's Restoration tragedy. In previews through Feb. 1. Opens Feb. 2 at 2. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Chicago—Walter Bobbie's bookless, setless revival of the Kander-Ebb-Fosse extravaganza of cynicism (choreographed this time around by Ann Reinking, who co-stars with Bebe Neuwirth) has enough razzle-dazzle and flashes of lucid sarcasm to set the audience cheering almost from the start. The story is about a woman who gets away with murder; this pared-down concert posing as a full-dress musical may do the same. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/96.) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Concert Pianist—In a new one-man comedy written by and starring Barry Neikrug, a master pianist attempts to find a compatible teacher. A Jewish Repertory Theatre production. (Closes Feb. 2.) (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

Do Lord Remember Me—A New Federal Theatre revival of James de Jongh's 1977 play, which he based on W.P.A. interviews with freed slaves, skillfully interweaving their words with snatches of gospel (powerfully sung here) and a visit from Nat Turner. Because the ensemble cast of five, with Barbara Montgomery at the emotional core, is so utterly convincing, the drama doesn't play as a mere polemic, and it isn't consumed by pain: it has some very funny scenes and a few moments of pure joy. Cleanly directed by Regge Life. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Closes Feb. 16.)

Family Values—A sex comedy by the Canadian playwright Carl Ritchie. Daniel Ettinger's set, an apartment awash in chintz, is much more tasteful than the sitcomlike proceedings. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 358-5174.)

Forbidden Broadway Strikes Back!—Gerard Alessandrini cuts a satirical swath through the Great White Way in the latest edition of his musical parody. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Full Gallop—The legendary, vividly eccentric fashion editor Diana Vreeland is the subject of Mary Louise Wilson and Mark Hampton's one-woman play, in which Wilson stars. Set in 1971, shortly after Vreeland was fired from *Vogue*, it's rich and resonant, with much to say about life that's worth hearing. A thoroughly satisfying evening in the theatre—very funny and very moving. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

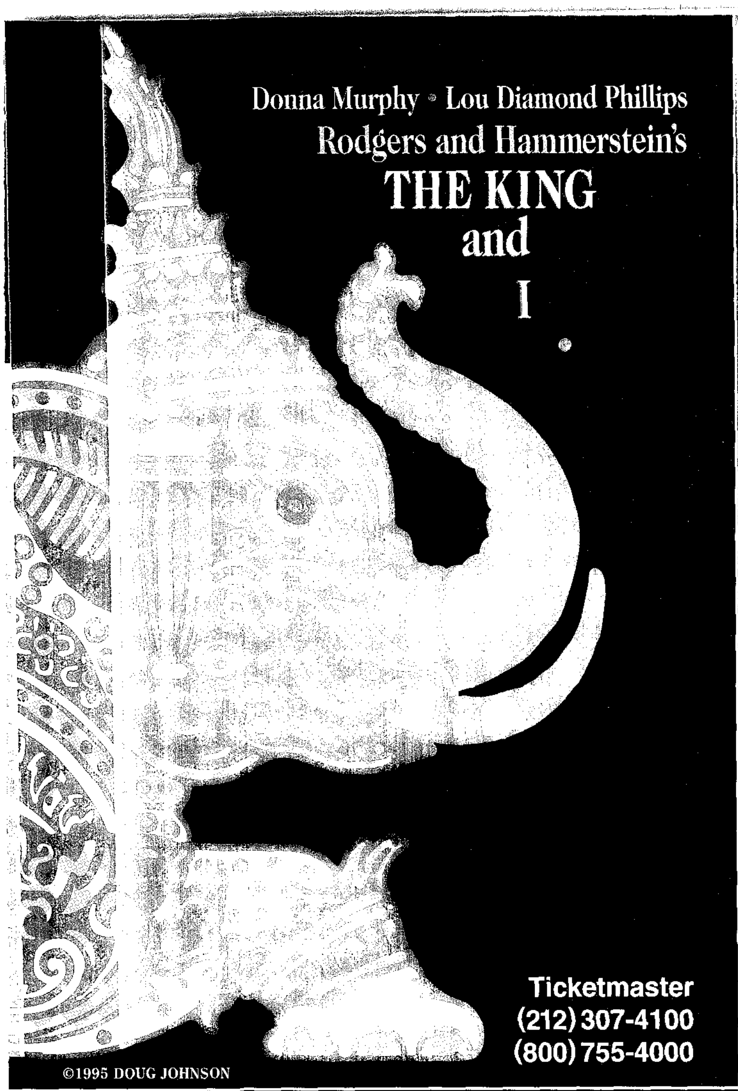
Howard Crabtree's When Pigs Fly—The exuberant designer Howard Crabtree died last June, and this revue of witty, satiric songs (created with and written and directed by Mark Waldrop, and sung by a talented cast dressed in Crabtree's sequinned, feathered, mind-boggling costumes) is a fitting cap to his career. (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Joseph Gabriel: Magic on Broadway—Mr. Gabriel has performed at the Las Vegas Flamingo Hilton for the past ten years, and his feats are certainly impressive, but it's all too clear from the trappings of his act—dancers in polka-dotted boxer shorts, a sequinned Elvis—that he hasn't left Nevada behind. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

La Mama—Jan. 29-Feb. 1 at 7 and Feb. 2 at 3:30: East Coast Artists' production of Chekhov's "Three Sisters," directed by Richard Schechner. . . . ¶ Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at 10: "Telethon," starring David Ilku and Ken Bullock. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

Late Nite Catechism—Maripat Donovan offers a commandingly funny performance as the lone nun in charge of an adult catechism class, and the audience brings as much to the performance as the script does. (St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

Marking—The actor Patrick Breen's first full-length play is about several young couples connected by friendship and infidelity, by funny coincidence and fateful consequence. It has its longueurs, but it also has an exceptional cast that brings out the most in Breen's



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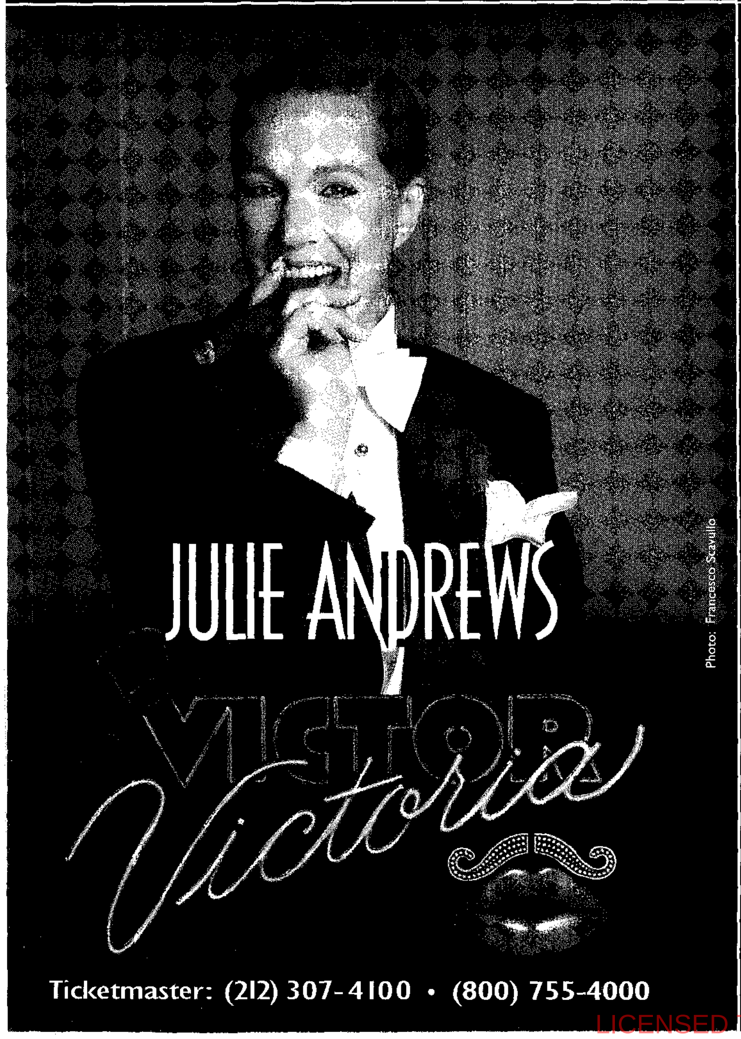

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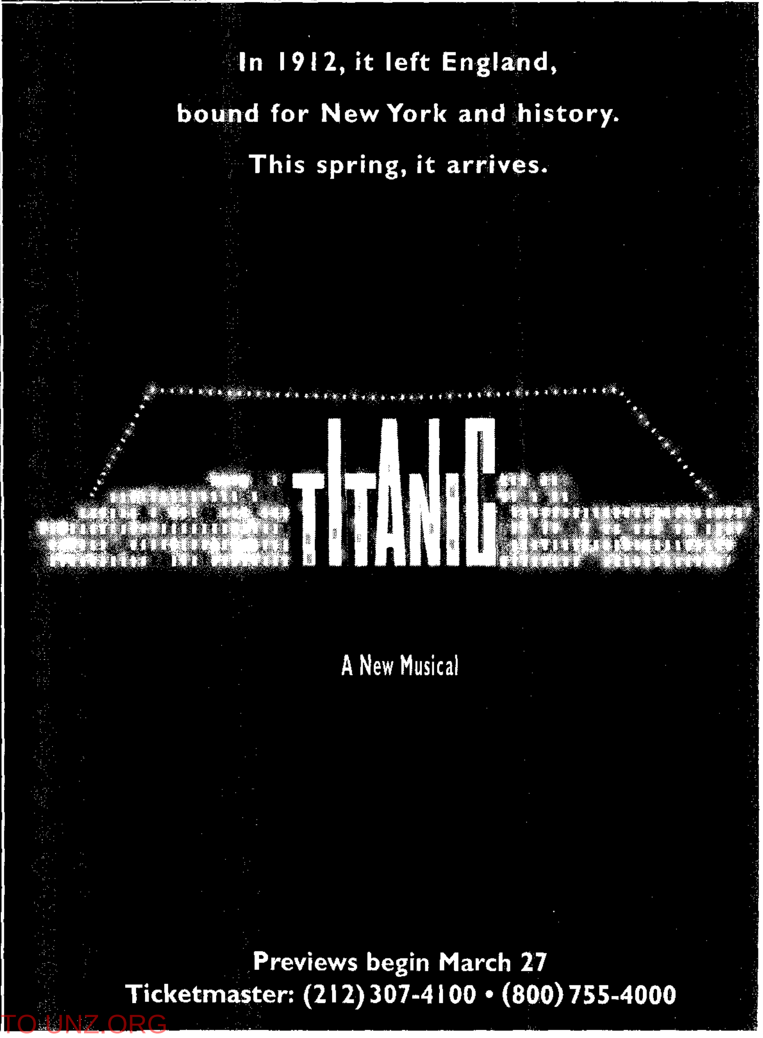

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intelligent script. The actors, under the direction of Elizabeth Gottlieb, include Peter Dinklage, Brian O'Byrne, Francie Swift, and Maria Tucci. (Judith Anderson, 422 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Feb. 9.)

Message to Michael—*Another* comedy-drama about gay men searching for love in New York City? If that's your attitude, then Rattlestick Productions' latest staging may not be your cup of tea. All the same, the young playwright Tim Pinckney shows a keen talent for witty dialogue and the well-timed one-liner in a depiction of gay culture which is happier and gentler than some of its predecessors. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 627-2556. Closes Feb. 2.)

Mock Trial—Romulus Linney directs Theatre for the New City's production of his drama. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes Feb. 9.)

My Astonishing Self—Donal Donnelly impersonates George Bernard Shaw, in a one-man show created by Michael Voysey from the playwright's letters, diaries, speeches, and other writings. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737.)

Neat—Charlayne Woodard's one-woman show, a companion piece to her 1993 "Pretty Fire," is about growing up black in the sixties and about her relationship with her aunt Beneatha, called Neat by her family. Neat suffered brain damage as an infant, and as she grew up she remained childlike; for her niece, her innocence and goodness were a source of pride, inspiration, and, at times, consternation. Woodard's show is a mixed bag as well: her depictions of older relatives are lovingly observant, but her portrayal of herself as a child is unbearably cute and false. She has exposed a great deal of herself here, but she has packaged her emotions a little too tidily, trading rawness for wryness. Directed by Tazewell Thompson. (1/27/97) (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes Feb. 9.)

No Way to Treat a Lady—The York Theatre Company begins an all-musical season with a comedy-thriller based on the William Goldman novel of the same title. Book, music, and lyrics by Douglas J. Cohen. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 935-5820. Closes Feb. 2.)

Old Wicked Songs—Jon Marans' well-written piece of sentimental sanctimony asks the question: Can a blocked, arrogant twenty-five-year-old pianist (Justin Kirk) find wisdom under the tutelage of a suicidal singing teacher (Hal Robinson) who survived the Holocaust? (The answer is yes.) (9/16/96) (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

Once Upon a Mattress—Gerald Gutierrez's revival of Mary Rodgers's 1959 musical, based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Princess and the Pea," has topnotch production values but very little reason for being, unless you have a fondness for dumb, Eisenhower-era sex jokes and marshmallowy melodies. That modern madcap Sarah Jessica Parker shines as the princess, but she deserves a vehicle that, to paraphrase Jerome Kern, is not merely lovely to look at but delightful to know. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Permanent Brain Damage—Richard Foreman and his Ontological-Hysteric Theatre's latest attempt to stop making sense is, strictly speaking, successful, but this new work is jarringly assaultive rather than jarringly provocative. Still, there's nothing like its surpassing, indescribable strangeness to be found in any other theatre, and it will knock some of the dust off your brain. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650.)

Present Laughter—As the monumentally egotistical West End star Garry Essendine, Frank Langella keeps the core of Noël Coward's 1939 comedy of bad manners alive with a full-tilt assault on the character's outrageousness. Unfortunately, the director, Scott Elliott, seems to think that he's liberating Coward by turning the play into a bisexual romp. But he orchestrates some delicious farce moments, and the supporting players are funny even when Elliott is leading them down blind alleys. (11/25/96) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Red Address—A businessman's public persona belies the circumstances of his passionate private life, in a psychological drama written by David Ives and starring Kevin Anderson. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103. Closes Feb. 2.)

Scapin—Bill Irwin's production (he has the title role, he directed, and, with the playwright Mark O'Donnell, he adapted the script) of Molière's comedy is a perfect blend of sweetness and anarchy. In cartoon terms, it's Disney meets Warner Bros.: there's no doubt that a certain *lapin* named Bugs Bunny has left his pawprints here. Some of the casting is questionable, but Christopher Evan Welch, who is making his New York début, raises only the question "When will we see him again?" He's sensational: game, rubbery, and hilarious, and every bit Irwin's clownish equal. (1/27/97) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Mabou Mines' "Peter and Wendy."

PIER CONSAGRA

Second-Hand Smoke—Mac Wellman apparently comes out of the School of Huh?: he loves playing with language, but in his new work, set in an end-of-the-millennium town populated by people who speak poetic gibberish, all play has made Mac a dull boy. The more he ruminates (on the conditional nature of words, the dangers of miscommunication, etc.), the less he illuminates. The few truly funny moments that he gives his excellent cast—which includes David Greenspan, Kristine Nielsen, and Joanna P. Adler—leave you wishing for more levity throughout. Richard Caliban is the director; Kyle Chepulis designed the ingenious set. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes Feb. 9.)

South—The playwright, novelist, and essayist Julian Green's 1953 drama, about a Polish military officer's visit to a Carolina plantation, is set on the night before the outbreak of the War Between the States. A Target Margin Theatre staging. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202. Closes Feb. 2.)

The Steward of Christendom—The Irish playwright Sebastian Barry's drama is set in 1932 in a County Wicklow mental home, and its title character is based on his great-grandfather, a Catholic loyalist to the British throne who was the last chief superintendent of the Dublin Metropolitan Police before the establishment of the Irish Free State. Starring Donal McCann and directed by Max Stafford-Clark. Presented by the Brooklyn Academy of Music. (Majestic, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

Vilna's Got a Golem—In a new play by Ernest Joselovitz, set in a small Eastern European town in 1889, a government censor attends the opening-night performance of a Yiddish theatre troupe's controversial production. With musical accompaniment by members of the Klezmer Conservatory Band. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797. Closes Feb. 2.)

You Say What I Mean But What You Mean Is Not What I Said—Five performers sing (nonsense syllables as well as recognizable words) and dance (sometimes onstage, sometimes on tables in the audience), in an overwhelming display of virtuosity and raw emotion which rarely makes rational sense and yet is often beautiful and occasionally quite moving. Grisha Coleman conceived, composed, and is one of the performers in this Hot Mouth production, presented by the Foundry Theatre. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 777-1441. Closes Feb. 9.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **BRING IN DA NOISE, BRING IN DA FUNK:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **THE KING AND I:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100. . . . **MASTER CLASS:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **VICTOR/VICTORIA:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—Jan. 29 at 8: "Coppélia." . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 8: "Ballo della Regina," "Zakouski," "Moves," and "La Sonnambula." . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 8: "Apollo," "A Schubertiad," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ Feb. 1 at 2: "Moziartiana," "A Schubertiad," and "Symphony in C." . . . ¶ Feb. 1 at 8: "La Sonnambula," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "Schoenberg/Wuorinen Variations," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ Feb. 2 at 3: "Coppélia." . . . ¶ Feb. 4 at 8: "Symphony in C," "Mozartiana," and "Western Symphony." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. The season continues through March 2.)

Molissa Fenley—The solo dancer brings impressive collaborators for her first Joyce engagement since 1995, when she sustained an opening-night injury here. Peter Boal, of N.Y.C.B., splits duties with Fenley in her new work, "Pola'a"; Broadway veteran Jane Smith shares the stage with her in "Trace"; and Paz Tanjuaquio, a lithe, Fenley-size soloist, alternates with the choreographer in "Sita," the homage to the Hindu goddess of peace

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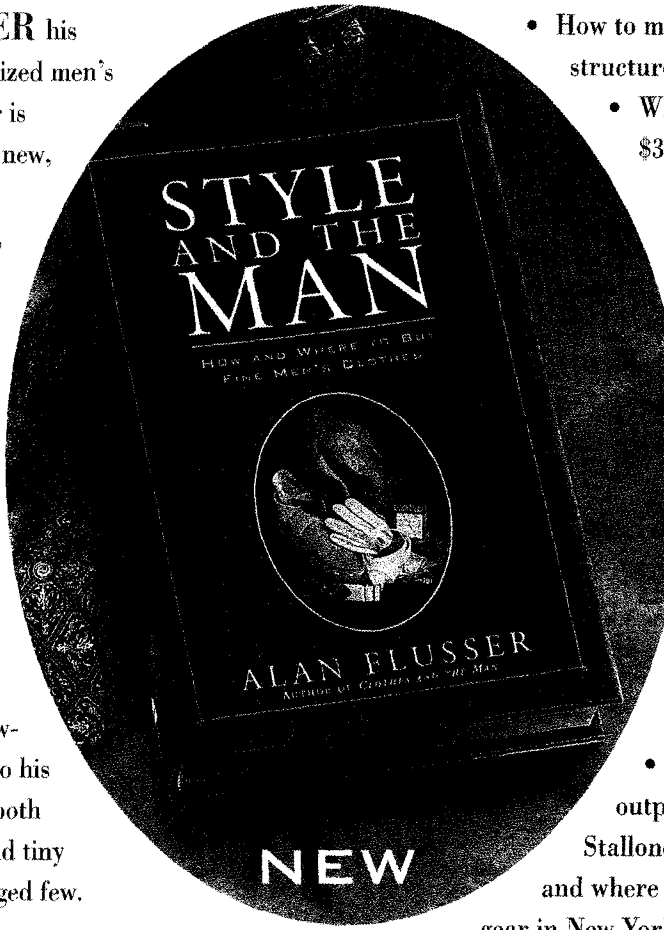

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- What the new luggage of choice has become for international travel;
- Where you can test a new golf putter in a net-lined room;
- Who offers 45 glove styles ...50 white shirt fabrics ...5,000 pipe styles;
- Where you can find a great belt for $15... a museum-quality belt buckle for $10,000;
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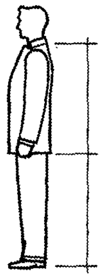

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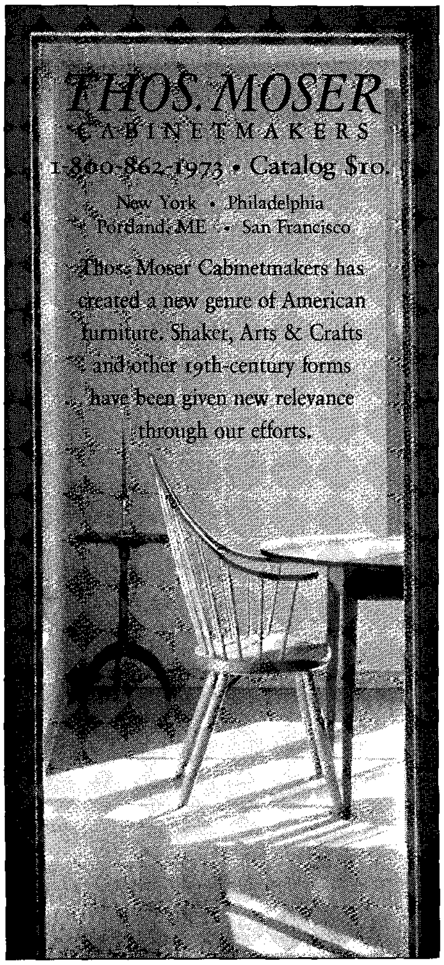
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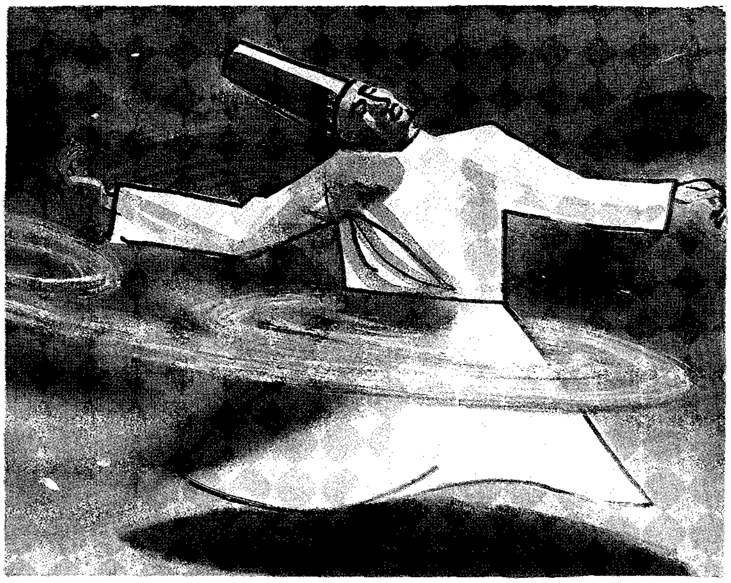
which Fenley was performing when she last fatefully graced this stage. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Jan. 28-31 and Feb. 1 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 2 and 7:30.)

Whirling Dervishes of Turkey—Clad in tall camel-hair hats (symbols of the tomb), weighted white skirts (the shroud of the ego), and soft slippers for turning, the eight Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes, of Konya, Turkey, spin to the chanted verses of Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet who, a friend prophesied, would "drown men's souls in a fresh life and in the immeasurable abundance of God." The Sufi ritual promises ecstasy through aesthetics. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 31 and Feb. 1 at 8.)

Karen Graham and Scott Cunningham—The choreographers, who are longtime dancers with the David Gordon/Pick Up Performance Group, perform together in "Firebugs Variations" and offer two premières: "Crossing Fields (34)," Graham's duet with Sarah Perron, and "Straw Dogs," the latest chapter in Cunningham's ongoing cultural critique. (Danspace, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. Jan. 31-Feb. 2 at 8:30.)



The Mevlevi Whirling Dervishes of Turkey, at City Center.

DAVID TOMB

Splitstream—Andrea Mills presents a multimedia work, "Halo Effect," which includes sound designs, video projections, poetry, and Mills's signature raw dance; Ellis Wood collaborates with four additional dancers in the première of "With the Grace of a Woman." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 3.)

"Not to Scale"—New Yorker Anita Cheng and Ann Arborite Whitley Setrakian renew old college ties (they met at the University of Michigan) and match choreography. Cheng brings "Forecast," "For the Quick," and three duets; Setrakian counters with "Her Face," "Hyacinth Rush," "Jester," and "Desperate Lovely." (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. Jan. 30-31 at 9 and Feb. 1-2 at 8.)

"Apollo's Banquet"—Baroque dancers Thomas Baird and Paige Whitley-Bauguess re-create eighteenth-century court entertainments, to the accompaniment of a period-instrument ensemble. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448. Feb. 3 at 8.)

"After Sorrow"—Director Ping Chong completes his East/West trilogy in a collaboration with choreographer Muna Tseng and composer Josef Fung. This installment consists of four solos by Tseng: "L'Histoire Chinoise," "The Whisper of Stone," "98.6: A Convergence in 15 Minutes," and the title work, a portrait of contemporary Vietnam. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Jan. 31-Feb. 1 at 7:30 and Feb. 2 at 3 and 7:30. Through Feb. 15.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Danzig—Low-rent metal rock. (Roseland, 239 W. 52nd St. 307-7171. Jan. 29 at 7:30.)

Kenny G. / Toni Braxton—It's easy to play the cynic and take potshots at the grinning, easy-on-the-ears jazz saxophonist from Seattle, but his success has grown to such gargantuan proportions that it's like kicking sand at King Kong. / The pint-size Toni Braxton is America's favorite R. & B. diva (the sight of her dwarfed by co-presenter Dennis Rodman was the high point of last year's MTV Awards); her "Un-break My Heart" is currently the No. 1 song in the land. Sonically speaking, you'll have a hard time finding a more tranquillizing evening. (Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 247-4777. Jan. 29-Feb. 1 and Feb. 3-4, all at 8.)

Dizzy Gillespie Tribute—Face it: you could hold a weekly tribute to Gillespie and still not fully mine his contributions. Two fierce trumpeters, Claudio Roditi and Jimmy Owens, evoke the Master; saxophonist Frank Foster and the rhythm section of pianist Mike Longo, bassist David Williams, and drummer Carl Allen provide the requisite steam. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. For information, call 598-0400. Jan. 30 at 7:30.)

Frank Kimbrough Ensemble / Matt Wilson Quartet—Pianist Kimbrough, a mainstay of the Jazz Composers Collective, uses his thorough knowledge of history (on the Collective's new Herbie Nichols Project, he skillfully navigates the intricate byways of that neglected genius's knotty music) to enliven his own inventive work. / Wilson vies with Leon Parker as the most musical young drummer on the scene today. His "As Wave Follows Wave" was one of the more intriguing recordings of last year; close attention should be paid to his leaping and bounding growth. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. Jan. 30 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

Toshi Reagon's Birthday Party—This uncompromising singer once gave up a major record deal because the suits wanted to reshape her image; now she releases her records herself. On the brilliant "The Rejected Stone" (1994), she drew on the African-American song tradition revitalized by her mom, Bernice Johnson Reagon, who is a founder of Sweet Honey in the Rock and who joins her in this concert. Her shows are celebratory—a shower of retro funk, urban blues, and folk—and they're all sung with evangelical fervor. To hear her is to believe. (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Jan. 31 at 8. For information, call 274-1948.)

Jamiroquai—England's love affair with African-American music hasn't waned since the glory days of the Beatles and the Stones. From the same U.K. scene that brought us Soul II Soul and the Brand New Heavies comes this funk-pop group led by Jason Kay, a twenty-seven-year-old white man who sounds remarkably like Stevie Wonder circa "Songs in the Key of Life." (Roxy, 515 W. 18th St. 307-7171. Feb. 3 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is always advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Blarney Star, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Decent sight lines, great greasy food, prodigiously talented waitresses, and a consistent roster of high-quality acts. Jan. 30: Quietly revered British singer-songwriter **ROY HARPER.** Jan. 31: **RICK DANKO.** Robbie Robertson has gone Hollywood and the true incarnation of The Band is no more, but when its fidgety-voiced bassist—still very much alive and kicking—plays a show, all bets are off. Danko is a rare bird, a sloppy performer who capitalizes on his uncanny ability to mine musical gold from pain and failure. Feb. 1 is devoted to the Fast Folk Music Revue, featuring **FIVE CHINESE BROTHERS,** one of smart pop's great journeyman acts. Think Squeeze or Crowded House, only louder, looser, bluesier—more American. Feb. 4: **SLO LEAK,** featuring seventies studio-musician legend Danny Korchmar. With volcanic blues phenomenon **TAB BENOIT.**

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Jan. 31: **PEZFARM** and local power-pop heroes **44.**

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. Feb. 1: Cocktail Nation, featuring the **FLYING NEUTRINOS.** This itinerant New Orleans jazz band—its members grew up in the Big Easy, took a brief detour through Europe, and wound up adrift in the East River on a homemade paddleboat—is a family affair. Twentysomething cousins Ingrid Lucia and Todd Lundagin lead the group: Lucia's sassy patter and mischievous grin are a lot like Billie Holiday's, and wonder boy Todd plays trombone, tap-dances, and has a disarming Chet Baker-like voice. Feb. 2: The **APPLES (IN STEREO).** Feb. 4: **HEATHER EATMAN.** The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 30: Irony and goofiness with adroit popsters **PSYCHO THE CLOWN.** Feb. 1: Woodstock veteran **RICHIE HAVENS.** Feb. 2: Klezmer music can bring out the goofball in some musicians; in the case of the **KLEZMATICS,** it happens en masse. They inject left-of-center mirth into an already mirthful music, but they also have the chops to back up their attitude, which is half downtown, half shtetl. Feb. 3: The **VIOLENT FEMMES,** gods of alternative rock from the days when it was simply "college radio."

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-4064)—Jan. 30: Precocious Staten Island pop duo **PROFESSOR AND MARYANN.**

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Feb. 3: **PULL MY DAISY** headlines an evening of topnotch alternative rock. Feb. 4: The Boston combo **GIGOLO AUNTS** has been flirting with darker material lately, but you can always count on them for tight harmonies and solid jangle-pop.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—**GOLDFINGER** stops by on Jan. 29. Often hailed as the world's greatest bar band, **NRBQ** (Jan. 31) can live up to the hype. There just isn't another outfit with such a mastery of virtually every American popular-music idiom, from rockabilly and blues to jazz and swing. The band hasn't been the same since its longtime guitarist, Big Al Anderson, quit a few years ago to pursue a solo career in Nashville, but in performance they still put out the goods. Feb. 1: **A DON PIPER SITUATION.**

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Jan. 31: Quirky world-music-flavored pop with **GEGGY TAH.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—The impudent goofiness of guitarist and vocalist **JOHN PIZZARELLI** brings a fresh breeze to the stuffy old Oak Room this month. Feb. 3: **ALEX DONNER,** in his cabaret show "New York, New York, My Home Town." Dining.

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—The legendary club has a new address and bigger digs. Jan. 30-Feb. 1: Trombonist **CONRAD HERWIG AND TROPICAL FIRE.** Feb. 3: How **TOSHIKO AKIYOSHI** has kept her big band going strong for twenty-plus years is anybody's guess. A showcase for its leader's distinctively modernist compositions, arrangements, and fluid bop piano, the orchestra also has a whirlwind of a soloist in Akiyoshi's husband, tenorist and flutist **LEW TABACKIN.** Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Jazz, mirrors, and a gift shop. Through Feb. 2: The **MILT JACKSON** quartet and the **JAMES MOODY** quartet. The agility, grace, elemental vigor, and soulful lyricism of vibraphonist Jackson are just as much on display when he leads his own band as they are in his berth on the Modern Jazz Quartet. He's one of our most important and satisfying improvisers. Moody's sublime command of saxophone, flute, and left-of-left-field humor is always a trip. Feb. 3: The **KLAUS SUONSAARI** quartet. Starting Feb. 4: The **ZAWINUL SYNDICATE** and the **YELLOWJACKETS.** Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through late March, the amazing **EARTHA KITT.** She is still a fierce and funny performer with a feral grip on her audience. At the end of a song she'll throw back her head and laugh, like some kind of carnivore after the kill; she chooses her victims from the front row, and when the show is over there's blood on the tables. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pia-

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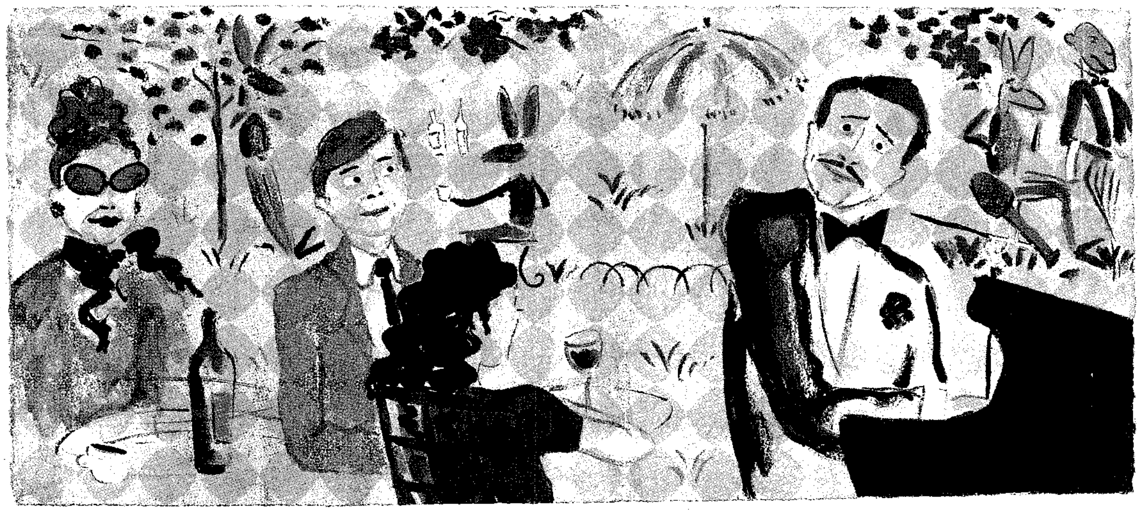
nist **PETER MINTUN** is in charge. A genuine throwback to a gentler time, this elegant performer specializes in curios from the twenties and thirties like "Kitten on the Keys," but he has also been known to play cartoon theme songs if the mood (or the crowd) warrants it. Agreeable and reassuring without being over-gracious, he's sort of a curio himself.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A sleek piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Feb. 2: The **JIMMY HEATH** quartet. The saxophonist and composer is also one of the great unsung bandleaders: his ensembles showcase his melodic writing, his ear for tonal color, and his innate understanding of the way horns and rhythm can sing together. Starting Feb. 4: The **STEPHEN SCOTT** quintet. Dining.



Pianist Peter Mintun, currently presiding at the Carlyle Hotel's Bemelmans Bar.

ELIZA GRAN

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—An Old New York kind of place, with dark wood panelling, white tablecloths, and brass figurine lamps. **VALERIE CAPERS** (piano) and **JOHN ROBINSON** (bass) are in through Feb. 1.

Maxim's, 680 Madison Ave. (751-5111)—In 1985, Pierre Cardin spent millions to open this mock-nineteenth-century bistro, which features stained glass, bevelled mirrors, and inlaid ceilings. But the eighties ended, and the club went dark for five years. A new management has revamped the menu, lowered the prices, and "done away with the dress code." **MORGANA KING,** whom Sinatra once called "a singer's singer," has the stage through Feb. 1. Dining.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. **TONY DANZA** (through Feb. 1) makes way for **VIC DAMONE** (starting Feb. 4). At the start of his career, in the postwar forties and fifties, Damone embodied the placid opulence of the era: he was polite and handsome, and his voice was as smooth and lustrous as silk taffeta (and just as stiff). He had a little success in Hollywood and a bit more on vinyl, but above all it's the years of supper clubs and casinos that have given him the distinctive ease that the Bill Murrays and Harry Connicks of the world can only parody or covet. He doesn't swing, but his phrasing is conversational, as are his wonderful stories about growing up in Bensonhurst—and the voice itself is still something to marvel at. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night. Jan. 30 is given over to the **CHRIS BYARS** quartet and Jan. 31-Feb. 1 to the **GEORGE COLLIGAN** quintet, featuring **INGRID JENSEN** and **BILLY DRUMMOND.** Stocked to the gills with exciting new players, the **JASON LINDNER BIG BAND** now holds court every Monday.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A convivial and crowded jazz club where the musicians are always top-shelf. Through Feb. 2: The **STANLEY COWELL** quartet. In the early seventies, Cowell's career seemed like a sure thing. That it never quite built up a sufficient head of steam hasn't diminished his prodigious talents as a pianist and composer. He's still one of the more thoughtful improvisers around, only now he's an exemplar of the "lost generation" of middle-aged players scattered by the onslaught of young lions rather than a young lion himself. Fortunately, he wears his experience well. Starting Feb. 4: The **CARLOS WARD** group. Dining.

Village Gate, 240 W. 52nd St. (307-5252)—The **RANDY SANDKE** quartet has the stage for two weeks. Sandke doesn't make it easy for you to get a handle on him. This outstanding trumpeter and composer alternates between neo-swing archivism and modernist projects that have a decidedly intellectual bent; he's the kind of odd man out we could use plenty more of. For this gig, he'll most likely check his experimentalism at the door, but not his rich tone or his stiletto-sharp phrasing. On Feb. 3, pianist and singer **KATHLEEN LANDIS** performs an all-Gershwin concert. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 28: The **BRAD MEHLDAU** trio makes its Vanguard début. The twenty-six-year-old Mehldau, an alumnus of Joshua Redman's band, is a nimble pianist with a predilection for shifting time signatures; he was also a very young protégé of Bill Evans. Starting Feb. 4: The **BOBBY HUTCHERSON** quartet. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** still holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—A tiny, low-key supper club where the jazz, like the Spanish-American cuisine, can take on a spicy, multicultural flavor. Through Feb. 1: The **DAVE LIEBMAN** quintet. While most sax players double on the soprano, Liebman devotes his full attention to that horn, and reveals new depths of passion and lyricism. The **BEN WOLFE** quartet is in on Feb. 4.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. Through Feb. 1: **HILTON RUIZ** (piano) and **ANDY GONZALEZ** (bass), with **JOE GONZALEZ** (conga) sitting in on the weekend. Ruiz is equally at home with both Latin music and jazz. The unsung hero of innumerable groups from the past two decades, he deserves serious appreciation for his own dexterous piano work.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Tiepolo and Tiepolo's Venice." The largest of the museum's trio of exhibitions related to Giambattisa Tiepolo (1696-1770) and his circle features eighty paintings and thirty-three etchings by the eighteenth-century Italian master—predominantly larger works, decorative series, and oil sketches. (See also the Morgan Library.) . . . ¶ The Costume Institute's much heralded "Christian Dior" blockbuster displays more than eighty opulent items from the decade beginning in 1947, when the designer first presented his influential New Look. Fifty years later, that silhouette's most startling aspect is the pelvis (padded into a breadbox shape), its most blissful achievement the surface simplicity of dresses elaborately handcrafted and structured within. Through March 23. . . . ¶ "Late Klee" showcases twenty seldom-seen drawings, paintings, and watercolors from 1925 to 1940, the last fifteen years of the artist's life, during which he was discredited by the Nazis, fired from his teaching job in Düsseldorf, and forced to return to his native Switzerland. Through April 13. . . . ¶ "The Gods of War: Sacred Imagery and the Decoration of Arms and Armor," a thought-provoking installation of sixty-five beautiful objects of warfare. Through November. . . . ¶ The cynosure of a large exhibition surveying the career of the Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) must certainly be the restored Ladies' Luncheon Room from Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tea Rooms, in Glasgow. Through Feb. 16. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, the 1980s." Forty examples from the Abstract Expressionist's final working decade. Through April 29. . . . ¶ "The Maximal Sixties: Pop, Op, and Figuration." Iconic work by Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Polke, Fahlström, Samaras, and other Aquarian artists. Through April 29. . . . ¶ "New Photography 12" features work by Richard Billingham, Thomas Demand, Osamu Kanemura, Sophie Ristelhueber, Georgina Starr, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 4. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—"Rrose Is a Rrose Is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography." Staged portraits and self-portraits by artists from Man Ray to Cindy Sherman. Through April 27. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway, at Prince St. (423-3500)—"The Messenger" and

"The Crossing," two video installations by Bill Viola. Through March 23. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—"Making Mischief," an excellent exhibition chronicling the Dada invasion of New York, from the Great War through the early twenties. Chief among its attractions is a significant selection of pieces by Marcel Duchamp, including a painstaking reconstruction (recently made by Swedish scholars) of his masterpiece "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even." Through Feb. 23. . . . ¶ "Romare Bearden in Black-and-White: Photomontage Projections 1964." Through March 20. . . . ¶ "A Passion for Pictures: Selections from the Charles H. Carpenter and the Charles Simon Collections." Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The renovated Hall of Vertebrate Origins is open, its dropped ceiling removed to reveal Calvert Vaux's skylit design. All the better to see the dunkleosteus, a sixteen-foot-long hanging model of an armored fish, based on the four-foot-long fossil of its head, with self-sharpening jawbones. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—The museum's extensive Chinese collection has handsome new quarters in which a careful, lucid presentation offers a broad look at the art of the Middle Kingdom, from Neolithic stone carvings to blue-and-white ceramics of the late Ch'ing dynasty. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—"Severo and the Sea Monsters" includes two bronzes from the workshop of the sixteenth-century Ravenna master, who specialized in grotesques of this kind. One, a youthful-looking Neptune triumphing over his scaly foe, is a familiar friend from the permanent collection. The other is a signed recent acquisition, an exquisitely executed inkwell in the form of a creature whose sinuous, graceful body, long, froggy fingers, and expressively wistful face combine in humorous pathos. Through March 9. . . . ¶ "Old Master Drawings from the Ratjen Foundation" offers a feast of sixty works from the collection of Wolfgang Ratjen, of Liechtenstein, most of them from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy and nearly all of them stunning. Through March 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

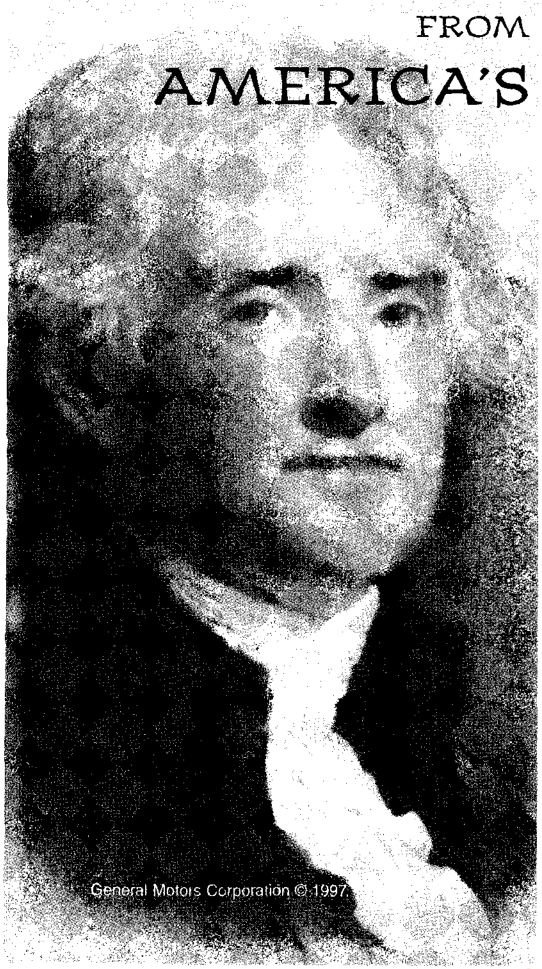
Grolier Club, 47 E. 60th St. (838-6690)—"William Morris: The Collector as Creator." More than a hundred objects, most of them books (including the ravishingly illuminated fourteenth-century English "Windmill Psalter"—along with a thousand-pound check to its seller—and an elegant seventeenth-century herbal), reflect the great Victorian aesthete's wide-ranging interests and show some of the ways he transformed these sources in his own work. We also learn about his literary tastes: Scott, Keats, Dickens, and, more surprisingly, Joel Chandler Harris (Brer Rabbit is depicted in one of his textiles). Through Feb. 15. (Open daily, except Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Rico Lebrun: The Holocaust Paintings" presents paintings and studies from the fifties by the Italian-American artist, based on snapshots of the camps which he discovered in a ten-year-old photography magazine. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St. (685-0008)—"Tiepolo and His Circle: Drawings in American Collections," the first course of this year's tercentennial feast in celebration of the eighteenth-century Venetian painter (for the main course, see the Metropolitan Museum). More than a hundred works on paper—by the painter, his sons, and his students—illustrate the development of his distinctively dramatic compositions along with increasingly triumphant solutions to the problems of perspective posed by ceiling frescos. A "Drunken Punchinello," passed out cold, is outstandingly piquant; a whole society is summoned up in the ground-level view of the soles of his feet, his hemispherical belly, his gaping nostrils, and the phallic hat behind his head. The library is also offering two related shows: contemporaneous Venetian drawings and illustrated books, and extravagant bookbindings from several Italian sources. Through April 13. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St.—"Henry Darger: The Unreality of Being," is a retrospective devoted to watercolors and pencil drawings (apparently the outcome of the artist's childhood in orphanages and an asylum for the feebleminded) of virtuous girls threatened by villainous adults. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St. (534-1672)—"New York Toy Stories" is a thoroughly delightful collection of some three hundred playthings, both homemade and commercially produced, from the past two centuries. In keeping with the urban emphasis, almost all are indoor toys. There are rocking horses and roller skates, carved sheep and lead soldiers, spectacular teething rings and rattles, board games, antique building blocks, handcrafted slingshots and shooters, familiar friends like the yo-yo and the Slinky, and fascinating discoveries like the phenakistascopes (pinwheel-like gadgets with little slits to look through at animated scenes). Allow plenty of time, even if you're not tak-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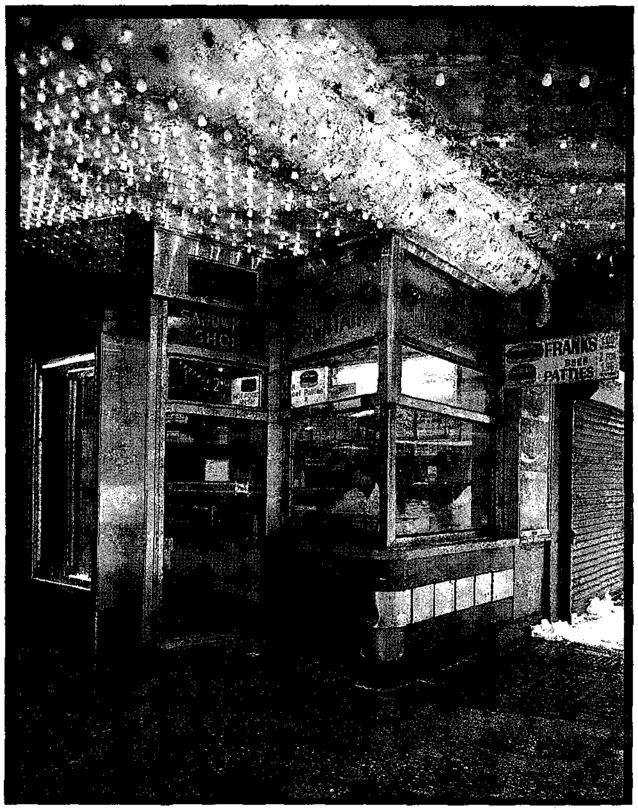
ing kids. Through April 27. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (369-4880)—"Theodore Clement Steele" demonstrates that this masterly modernist deserves to be better known. Steele (1847-1926) studied in Munich and worked mostly in his native Indiana; he greatly admired Monet, whose influence is evident in many of these forty-eight serene works, nearly all of them landscapes. Often, as in the graceful "Morning by the Stream," they are warmed with adroitly used, subtly surprising coral hues. There are superb light-on-water passages in "Pleasant Run" and "The Shades," and the cows are quite unforgettable. Through March 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5, and Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

Schomburg Center, Malcolm X Blvd. at 135th St. (491-2265)—"Bearing Witness: African-American Vernacular Art of the South" highlights woodcarvings, scarecrows, clay figurines, clubhouse frescoes, paintings, and other works by self-taught artists. Through March 29. (Open Mondays through Wednesdays, noon to 8; Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 5.)



Andrew Moore's "Grand Luncheonette" (see Photography).

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, uptown and downtown galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; Chelsea galleries are generally closed Tuesdays and open Sundays.)

Magdalena Abakanowicz—"Mutants," two recent cycles by the Polish artist which together comprise a sad, unsociable herd of aardvark-shaped, cattle-size creatures constructed of burlap and glue over metal frames. In a few cases, draping creates paradoxically expressive faces, but the over-all effect is one of desolate anonymity. The show includes a few other works: birds (some metal, some wire) and "Show Cases," one an intriguing arrangement of animal horns irregularly grouped like people mingling at a party. Some works include feathers, identified as "fedders"; the spelling must be intentional, but its meaning is as teasingly mysterious as that of the faceless animals. Through Feb. 11. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. 541-4948. Open Mondays.)

Mark Francis—Eight large, strikingly original images, chiefly based on microphotographs of cells and chromosomes, by a young Irish-born and London-based artist; this is his first solo New York show. The austere, glowing beauty of the paintings, all done last year—mostly in variously shaded blacks on variously shaded whites—presents a decidedly seductive view of biological process. Through Feb. 22. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929.)

Stuart Shils—A refreshing show of twenty deceptively modest works: little landscapes (most are about a foot square) painted in oil on primed paper. Some, like two Irish scenes, are such bold distillations that without their titles you might think they were nonrepresentational. Yet these pictures, as well as more detailed ones such as the confident "Buildings and Trees in Sunlight" and the shimmery "Rooftops with Snow, Early Morning," capture particular places in specific lights with virtuoso economy. Through Feb. 8. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050.)

Jimmy Wright / Jack Bush (1909-77)—Sixteen outscale paintings and pastels of flowers which look like what Van Gogh might have done on acid. In some of them, the writhing, withered petal forms, usually unnaturally bright (e.g., vermillion) and often set against phosphorescent backgrounds, resemble crackling flames. The artist has said that in painting flowers "part of the challenge is not getting sentimental"; he has certainly risen to it. / "The Decade of Discovery 1952-1962" presents eight works from the years when the Canadian artist first began exploring ideas from the New York School. Both shows through Feb. 1. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 247-2111.)

"That Way Madness Lies: Expressionism and the Art of Gugging"—The artists at the Gugging mental hospital, near Vienna, most of whom have no prospect of recovery, had their first show in 1970. Displaying their work alongside that of various Expressionists, who tended to glorify madness (and many of whom—Gerstl, Beckmann, Kokoschka, Schiele—had some history of mental illness themselves), is a fruitful idea. The patients' intense output stands up well against the Expressionists'; Johann Fischer's memorable "Woman Ski Jumper" is fine enough to pass for the real thing. Through March 15. (Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. 245-6734.)

Short List—**GARY BROTMEYER,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444. Through March 1. . . . **CHO DUCK HYUN,** Emmerich, 41 E. 57th St. 752-0124. Through Feb. 15. . . . **EARL CUNNINGHAM,** Beacon Hill Fine Art, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 734-3636. Through March 1. . . . **WILLEM DE KOONING,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. 243-0200. Through March 29. . . . **DAN FLAVIN** and **KAZIMIR MALEVICH,** Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **YVONNE JACQUETTE** and **LOUIS LOZOWICK,** Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669. Both shows through Feb. 8. . . . **AGNES MARTIN,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Feb. 15. . . . **PATTI SMITH,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. 980-5454. Through Feb. 8. . . . **NIELE TORONI,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Open Mondays; through Feb. 15. . . . **BILL TRAYLOR,** Hirschl & Adler Modern, 21 E. 70th St. 535-8810. Through March 8.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Short List—**HEIDE FASNACHT,** Maynes, 529 W. 20th St. 741-3318. Through Feb. 23. . . . **ALIX STEWART LAMBERT,** Team, 527 W. 26th St. 279-9219. Open Fridays through Sundays; through March 2. . . . **JEFF NELSON,** Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770. Opens at noon; through Feb. 2. . . . **RUDOLF STINGEL,** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Open Tuesdays, closed Sundays; through Feb. 22. . . . **MARNIE WEBER,** Fredericks, 504 W. 22nd St. 633-6555. Through March 2.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

William W. Adkins—Patent designs, in ballpoint pen on poster board, by an inventor who lives in a shack and believes he is working for the military. The black-and-white drawings—plans for such quixotic gizmos as a "Hot Burning Sand Cuff" and a "Bevelled Rasp Sack"—are bold, obsessive, and neatly annotated with indecipherable specifications. Through Feb. 1. (Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. 780-0071.)

John Baldessari—"National City Part Two—1996," a superb group of new paintings by the grand master of California conceptualism. He grew up in little National City, just south of San Diego, and it was here, in the late sixties, that he first made text paintings and photo-emulsions on canvas. Last year he went back. The new canvases adhere to the old format, and many retain the moody grisaille palette; in some, however, the artist has made striking use of a more recent technique, ink-jet color printing on canvas. The streets and buildings Baldessari photographs are typically undistinguished—Nowheresville, U.S.A.—but the effect is a kind of strung-out, So-Cal Baudelairean poetry. Through Feb. 8. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

Alan Belcher—"Friends," soft sculptures of acrylic plush and polyester fibrefill, the raw materials of stuffed animals. They are largely abstract, although representational elements (fried eggs, soccer balls, brains) frequently intrude. There is no mistaking the influences of Claes Oldenburg and, more recently, Mike Kelly, yet these cuddly mutants don't seem excessively derivative. Through Feb. 8. (Shainman, 560 Broadway. 966-3866.)

Nabil Nahas—Medium- and large-scale paintings featuring thickly built-up surfaces of acrylic pigment mixed with pumice. The colors are often startlingly, even jarringly, bright, and their combinations can really set your eyeballs spinning. Through Feb. 15. (Sperone Westwater, 142 Greene St. 431-3685.)

Robert Smithson (1938-73) / **Massimo Antonaci**—"Issues of Entropy," works on paper and a large sculpture by the seminal sixties figure, whose interest in states of disorder and decay continues to have a profound influence on younger artists. The Weber gallery does a great service in regularly showing his work; now it's time for a major museum to mount a comprehensive retrospective. / "Has Become the Keystone of the Arch," five glass panels that the Italian artist has called metaphysical Polaroids. Both shows through Feb. 8. (142 Greene St. 966-6115.)

Robert Whitman—"Great Lakes" (1996), a new installation by one of the original "happenings" artists of the late fifties and early sixties. He uses various mixed-medium elements (mirror fragments, objets trouvés, a scrim, video projections), and his elaborate mise en scène recalls his intense involvement with avant-garde theatre. On the whole, though, this installation pales in comparison with his last show here. Through Feb. 8. (Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St. 431-9224.)

Short List—**MARINA ABRAMOVIC,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. 343-2405. Through Feb. 22. . . . **BARRY X BALL,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. 219-9600. Through Feb. 8. . . . **NANCY CHUNN,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. 226-3232. Through Feb. 15. . . . **EMIKO KASAHARA,** Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. 343-7300. Through Feb. 1. . . . **SHERRY KERLIN,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. 431-6880. Through

March 1. . . . **ANNETTE MESSAGER,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 22. . . . **ROBERT MORRIS,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. 431-5160. Through Feb. 8. . . . **CLAES OLDENBURG,** Inglett, 100 Wooster St. 343-0573. Through Feb. 22. . . . **SHERYL RUBINSTEIN,** Bridgewater/Lustberg, 560 Broadway. 941-6355. Through Feb. 8. . . . **BIANCA SFORNI,** Kasmin, 74 Grand St. 219-3219. Through Feb. 22.

PHOTOGRAPHY

BRUCE DAVIDSON—"American Photographs," a survey of the artist's career, including pictures of a Brooklyn gang, residents of Spanish Harlem, subway riders, civil-rights demonstrators, and Central Park. Through Feb. 22. (Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. 628-5300.)

YASUHIRO ISHIMOTO—Thirty black-and-white photographs made in Chicago between 1950 and 1961. The subjects include children with masks, cars, bathers, and street scenes. In the small gallery there is a complementary selection of works by Ishimoto's Chicago teachers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind. Both shows through Feb. 22. (Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. 226-1220.)

DAVID LEVINTHAL—The first large survey of the artist's series of inanimate figures in elaborate dioramas: cowboys, storm troopers, bathing beauties, Japanese-made sex-and-bondage figurines, blackface icons. Through March 21. (International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8. . . . ¶ A complementary show of the "Blackface" series is at Borden, 560 Broadway, through Feb. 28. 431-0166.)

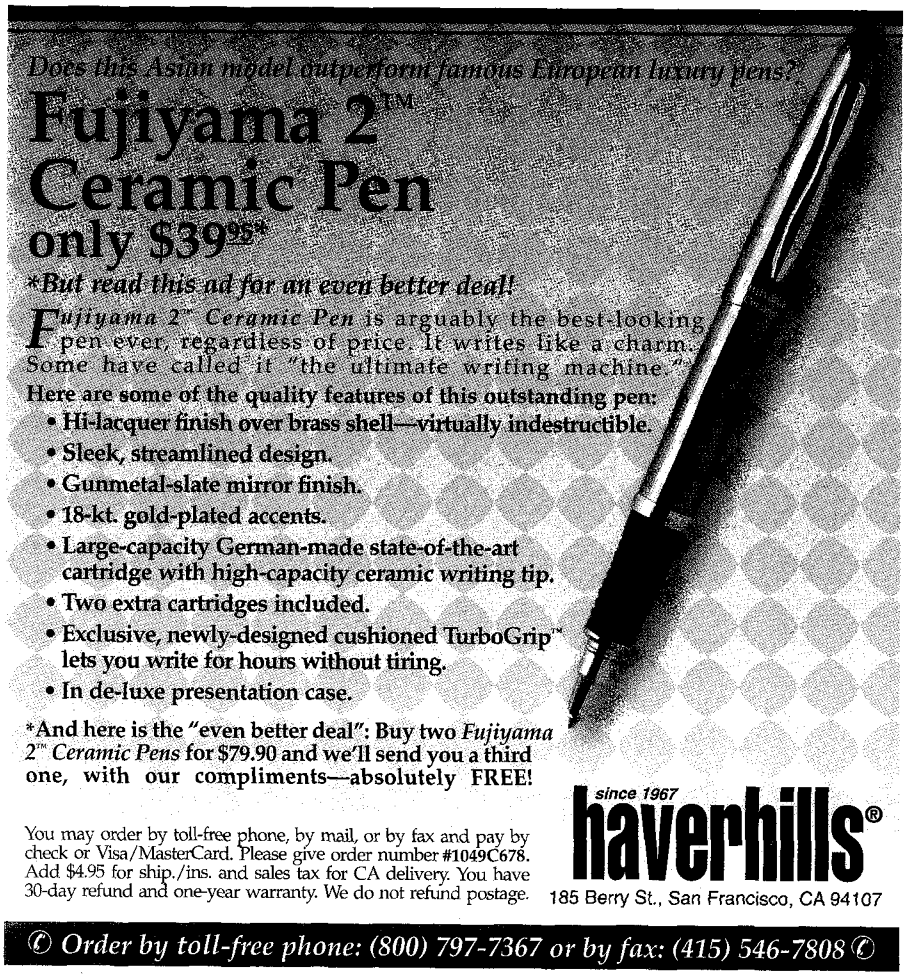
ANDREW MOORE—Single-image color views of the dilapidated interiors of Times Square theatres. The straightforward treatment is a departure for the photographer, who characteristically produces multi-image evocations of New York City. Nothing is lost, however—his earlier poetic constructs now give way to broader arenas for the imagination to roam. The vaulted smoking room of the New Amsterdam Theatre becomes a charred, cold chamber; a peeling dressing room, bathed in stop-light red, looks as if it's heard more than its share of backstage whispers. "Grand Luncheonette," the only exterior on view, captures a dingy, chrome-faced diner and with it some of the spirit of the best New York street photography. Through Feb. 15. (Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255.)

WALTER ROSENBLUM—Vintage New York City and Second World War photographs. Through March 1. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St. 570-1223.)

"ZEITGEIST BECOMES FORM: GERMAN FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY, 1945-1995"—Close to two hundred works by thirty-nine photographers, including Regina Relang, Hubs Flöter, Helmut Newton, Ellen von Unwerth, and Wolfgang Tillmans. Through Feb. 23. (Hearn, 727-7366, and Morris Healy, 243-3753, both at 530 W. 22nd St.)

SHORT LIST—**MARK ABRAHAMSON,** Eno, 594 Broadway. 226-5342. Through Feb. 13. . . . **RUDY BURCKHARDT,** De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 262-5050. Through Feb. 8. . . . **KONRAD CRAMER,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through March 2. . . . **ADOLF FASSBENDER,** Gallery 292, 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Feb. 22. . . . **F. C. GUNDLACH,** American Fine Arts, 22 Wooster St. 941-0401. Through March 1. . . . **KENRO IZU,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Feb. 22. . . . **PETER LINDBERGH,** Danziger, 130 Prince St. 226-0056. Through March 1. . . . **JOEL MEYEROWITZ,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through March 15. . . . **NICHOLAS NIXON,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through March 8. . . . **HERB RITTS,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Feb. 22. . . . **DAVID STEPHENSON** and **MAXWELL MACKENZIE,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Both shows through Feb. 15. . . . **JOEL STERNFELD** and **ROBERT FRANK,** Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 759-7999. Both shows through Feb. 22.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum.)



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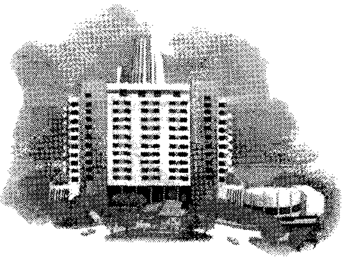

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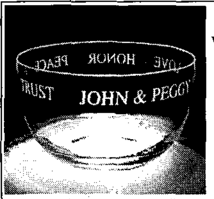

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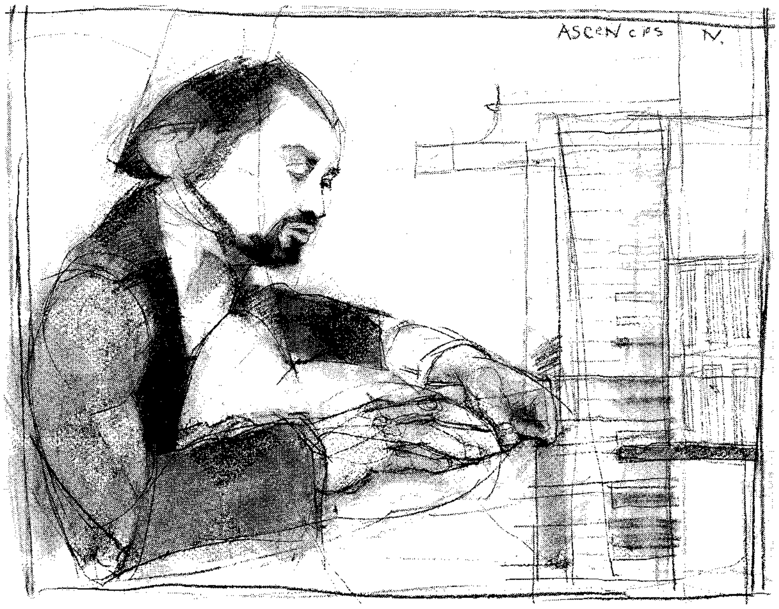
CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800, and for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and **PAGLIACCI**, with Dolora Zajick, Kristján Jóhannsson, and Vassili Gerello in the former, and Elizabeth Holleque, Vladimir Bogachov, and Leo Nucci in the latter; Simone Young conducts both. (Jan. 29 at 8.) . . . With Ghena Dimitrova instead of Ms. Zajick. (Feb. 1 at 8.) . . . **UN BALLO IN MASCHERA**, with Deborah Voigt, Youngok Shin, Florence Quivar, Luciano Pavarotti, and Juan Pons; James Levine. (Jan. 30 and Feb. 3 at 8.) . . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO**, with Hei-Kyung Hong, Barbara Bonney, Dawn Upshaw, James Morris, and Michele Pertusi; Leopold Hager. (Jan. 31 at 8.) . . . With Kiri Te Kanawa, Ms. Bonney, Jane Bunnell, Mr. Morris, and Jeffrey Black; Mr. Hager. (Feb. 4 at 8.) . . . **I PURITANI**, with Ruth Ann Swenson, Stuart Neill, Thomas Hampson, and Alastair Miles; Edoardo Müller. *(Feb. 1 at 1:30.) (Metropolitan Opera* House. 362-6000.)


ASCENCIOS N.

Jon Kimura Parker with the Warsaw Philharmonic, at Carnegie Hall.

N. ASCENCIOS

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—The orchestra celebrates the Schubert bicentennial with a week of concerts and conversations. Jan. 30-Feb. 1 at 8: Kurt Masur conducts Schubert's "Rosamunde" Overture and his C-Major Symphony (the "Great"). The program opens with Hudson Shad, a men's vocal ensemble, performing four of the composer's part-songs: "Mondenschein," "Nachtgesang im Walde" (rarely performed, as it calls for an accompaniment by four French horns), "Ständchen" (in an orchestration by the nineteenth-century Wagner conductor Felix Mottl, here with mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson as soloist), and "Wer Ist Gross?" . . . **NOTE:** Each of these concerts will be preceded by a lecture or panel discussion and a recital exploring three Schubert songs—"Die Forelle," "Trock'ne Blumen," and "Erlkönig"—in their original versions and in elaborations by Schubert and Liszt. Call the box office for times of pre-concert events, which are open to ticket holders at no extra charge. . . . ¶ Feb. 1 at 2: Tania León conducts a Young People's Concert celebrating Schubert's birthday. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. . . . **NOTE:** Audience members should make a beeline for the current archival exhibit on the Promenade level, which investigates the introduction of Schubert's music to America and its reception here by early listeners and critics.)

ORCHESTRA OF ST. LUKE'S—In a break from the week's profusion of Schubert, three works by his idol: André Previn conducts Beethoven's "Coriolan" Overture, his Piano Concerto No. 4 (with Horacio Gutiérrez), and an orchestral adaptation of his String Quartet in C-Sharp Minor (Op. 131). Schubert asked that this quartet be played as he lay dying; as one of the participating violinists later put it, "The King of Harmony had sent the King of Song a friendly bidding to the crossing." (Carnegie Hall. Jan. 29 at 8.)

FOCUS! 1997—The final three programs of the Juilliard School's annual festival of twentieth-century music, which this year focusses on the work of Henry Cowell (1897-1965) and his contemporaries. Jan. 29-30 at 8: Chamber music and piano pieces. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St.) . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 8: Orchestral works, with Diego Masson conducting the Juilliard Orchestra. (Alice Tully Hall. For free tickets, which are required for all festival concerts, call 769-7406.)

MANNES ORCHESTRA—Lukas Foss conducts his "Night Music for John Lennon," as well as Jacob Druckman's "Seraphic Games," Joan Tower's *Duets for Chamber Orchestra,* and Tchaikovsky's "Francesca da Rimini." (Alice Tully Hall. Jan. 30 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 875-5050.)

CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA—At Carnegie Hall, Christoph von Dohnányi conducting. Jan. 30: Schubert's B-Minor Andante (D. 936a, a *modern completion of a movement intended* for a tenth symphony), orchestral arrangements (by Brahms, Webern, and others) of seven Schubert songs (featuring baritone Olaf Bär), the Adagio from Mahler's Symphony No. 10, and Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. . . . ¶ Jan. 31: A program on Schubert's two-hundredth birthday combines his C-Major Symphony (the "Great") with Berio's "Rendering" (in which the later composer provides an entirely modern context for orchestral sketches that Schubert never developed into a complete piece). . . . ¶ Feb. 1: Schubert's Symphony No. 5 and Mahler's Symphony No. 1. (Evenings at 8.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY—Gerard Schwarz leads Mozart's Symphony No. 28 and G-Major Piano Concerto (K. 453, with John Browning), as well as Stephen Albert's "Flower of the Mountain" (with soprano Janet Williams) and Strauss's Four Interludes from "Intermezzo." (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Feb. 1 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 5.)

WARSAW PHILHARMONIC—Since winning the prestigious Leeds International Piano Competition in 1984, the Canadian Jon Kimura Parker has carved out a career that bears his personal imprint as strongly as his playing does. Alongside eighty or ninety annual "standard" engagements, he reserves a block of at least two weeks for performing in isolated Canadian communities that nobody else bothers to visit. Last October, for example, he played Beethoven, Berg, and lots of contemporary music (his passion) in the movie theatre of Iqaluit, a town of three thousand hardy inhabitants just south of the Arctic Circle, on Baffin Island. He looks askance at recordings, though he does consent to enter a studio if he believes his interpretation of a work is really different enough from anyone else's to merit the expense. (Telarc is due to release his reading of Barber's Piano Concerto imminently.) In this concert, he'll be featured in Rachmaninoff's "Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini." Lutoslawski's Symphony No. 4 and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade" round out the program, which Kazimierz Kord conducts. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 2 at 2.)

ARTEK Ensemble—Gwendolyn Toth leads the period-instrument orchestra, vocal soloists, and the St. Francis of Assisi Choir in choral works by Schubert, including his G-Major Mass and four settings of the "Salve Regina." (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Feb. 2 at 3. No tickets necesary.)

Absolute Ensemble—Villa-Lobos's Chôros No. 7, the première of Chris Theofanidis's Bassoon Concerto (with Martin Kuuskmann), John Adams's Chamber Symphony, and works by Frank Zappa, all conducted by Kristjan Järvi. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 2 at 3.)

Orchestre National de France—Charles Dutoit conducts Ravel's "Valses Nobles et Sentimentales," Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos (with Alexei Kuznetsov and Valentina Lisitsa), and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Feb. 2 at 3.)

Jupiter Symphony—Arturo Delmoni is the soloist in Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, and William Wolfram is featured in Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 1. Jens Nygaard conducts both works, as well as a set of contredanses by Cherubini. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. Feb. 3 at 2 and 7 and Feb. 4 at 8. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

RECITALS

Talk-and-Play—Jan. 30 at 7: Pianist Ruth Laredo discusses and performs Brahms. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.) . . . ¶ Feb. 2 at 3: Pianist Alan Gampel elucidates Chopin. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 734-2130.)

Bargemusic—Presenting string quartets by Tchaikovsky (his First) and Brahms (in C Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061. Jan. 30 at 7:30 and Feb. 2 at 4.)

"A Schubert Sampler"—Actress Tammy Grimes, soprano Marvis Martin, tenor Steven Tharp, flutist Paula Robison, violinist Scott St. John, and others join in an all-Schubert program that includes songs, the "Trout" Quintet, excerpts from the G-Major Mass, and the composer's only melodrama ("Abschied," D. 829, composed in 1826, and here offered as "Farewell to the Earth"). (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 30 at 8.)

Festival Chamber Music Society—Presenting trios by Beethoven, Milhaud, and Arensky. (Merkin Concert Hall. Jan. 30 at 8.)

Michelle DeYoung—In her New York début recital, the mezzo-soprano performs Haydn's "Arianna a Naxos," as well as songs by Debussy, Strauss, Mahler, and Schoenberg; with pianist Kevin Murphy. (Weill Recital Hall. Jan. 31 at 8.)

Arianna Goldina and Rémy Loumbrozo—The duo-pianists perform music by Milhaud and by Americans who fell under the influence of French composition. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160. Feb. 1 at 2.)

"Schubert's Universe"—Feb. 1 at 4: A round-table discussion of Schubert's Vienna. . . . ¶ At 7: Performances of Schubert's B-Flat-Major Piano Trio and "Trout" Quintet. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949.)

Susan Graham—The mezzo-soprano's New York début recital includes music by Mozart, Mahler, and Poulenc; pianist Steven Blier assists. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Feb. 2 at 2.)

St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble—Offering a bit of everything: Mozart's Oboe Quartet, Hindemith's "Abendkonzert No. 4," Beethoven's Clarinet Trio, Ravel's "Chansons Madécasses" (with baritone William Sharp and pianist Todd Crow), and Arensky's String Quartet. (Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway. Feb. 2 at 2. For information about tickets, call 212-840-7470.)

Itzhak Perlman and Daniel Barenboim—The violinist and the pianist perform an all-Schubert program. (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 3 at 8.)

Ursula Oppens—The pianist lives up to her reputation as a champion of new music with a performance of Tobias Picker's "Four Etudes for Ursula" (composed last year); she also honors the canon, playing two sonatas by Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 54, and in B-Flat Major, Op. 106—the "Hammerklavier") and Rachmaninoff's "Études-Tableaux" (Op. 33). (Carnegie Hall. Feb. 4 at 7:30.)

Patricia Spencer—The flutist, assisted by pianist Linda Hall, offers works by Thea Musgrave (a staging of her "Orfeo"), Ge Gan-ru (a première), Harvey Sollberger, and others. (Merkin Concert Hall. Feb. 4 at 8.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Local Roots—Since November, Felicia Young and dozens of other volunteers have gathered each week in the headquarters of Earth Celebrations, an environmental-arts organization that Young founded in 1991, to turn bamboo, tissue paper, fabric, and assorted other materials into the costumes, giant lanterns, and fifteen-foot-tall puppets that will be trotted out this Saturday for a candlelit procession around Tompkins Square Park. Its purpose, according to Young, is to "raise awareness and preserve our community gardens, which are all being threatened by development." The annual pageant also features dancers, an Uruguayan *candombe* band, and a bell chorus (open to volunteers who bring their own bells). (638 E. 6th St., between Avenues B and C. Feb. 1 at 7. For more information, call 777-7969.)

Readings—Jan. 30 at 6:30: Poet Jayne Cortez delves into her collected works. (Biblio's, 317 Church St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 6:30: Amy Bloom reads from her novel, "Love Invents Us." (Rizzoli, 454 West Broadway. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Feb. 3 at 7:30: First-time novelists Patricia Chao, Karin Cook, Peter Landesman, and Claire Messud read from their respective opuses. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 645-5848.) . . . ¶ Feb. 3 at 8:15: The 92nd Street Y and The Academy of American Poets present a reading by new poets, with Maureen Seaton, Robyn Selman, and Reginald Sheperd fitting the bill. (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

Talks—Jan. 29 at 6: John Oakes (of Four Walls Eight Windows), Jean Casella (of the Feminist Press), Griselda Ohannessian (of New Directions), and other representatives of small and independent presses discuss publishing in the age of the Internet, in a forum organized by the New York chapter of the Women's National Book Association. (Seagram Building, 375 Park Ave., at 52nd St., fourth floor. 781-1809.) . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 6:30: Tenzin Choedrak, senior personal physician to the Dalai Lama, explains ways that Tibetan medicine can keep you sane. (Asia Society, Park Ave. at 70th St. 517-2742.) . . . ¶ Feb. 2 at 6: Designers Bill Blass and Michael Kors join Amy M. Spindler, fashion critic for the *Times*, to consider the future of haute couture. (Sotheby's, York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Walk—Feb. 1 at 1: Seth Kamil, of Big Onion Walking Tours, leads a stroll down the Bowery, the street where P. T. Barnum had a museum before he opened his circus. (439-1090.)

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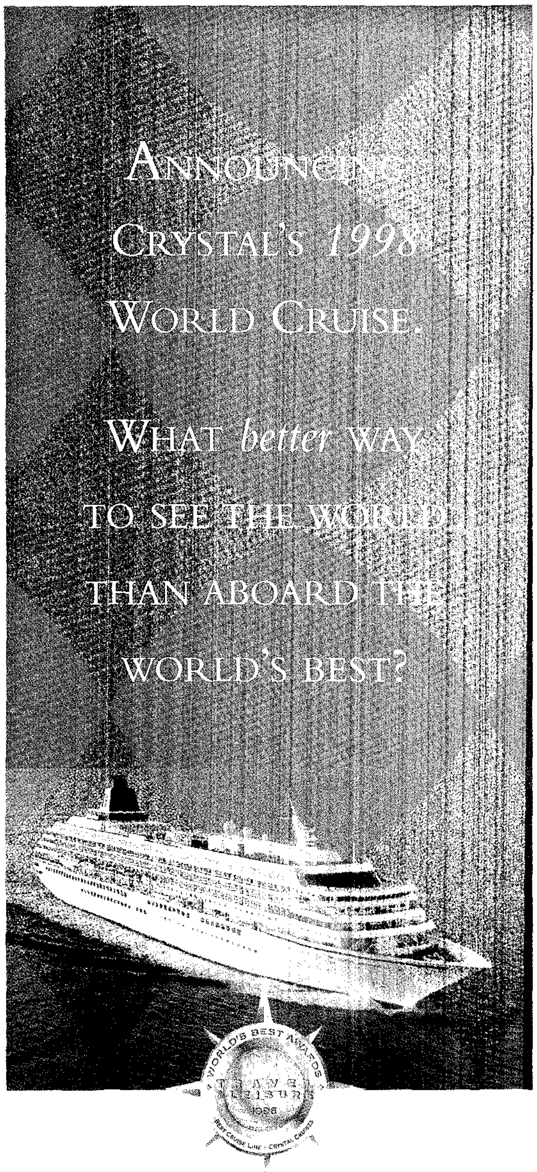

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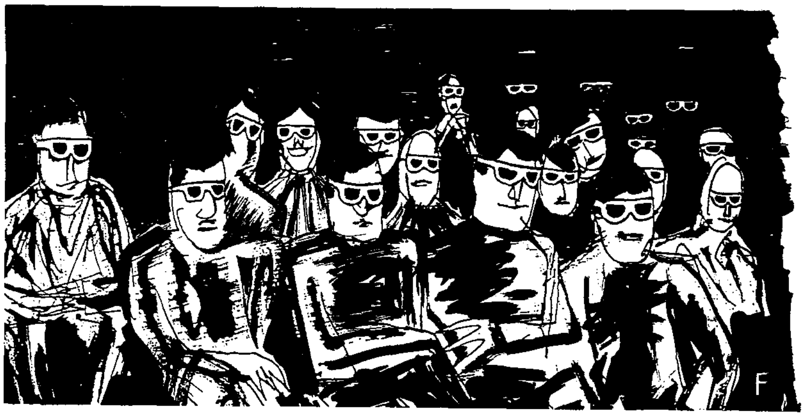


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Gridlock'd—Two drug-addicted Detroit performance artists (Tim Roth and the late Tupac Shakur) try to kick the habit, in a comedy written and directed by Vondie Curtis Hall. Also with Thandie Newton. Opening Jan. 29. (Astor Plaza and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Johns—One December day in the life of two Hollywood street hustlers (Lukas Haas and David Arquette). Written and directed by Scott Silver. Opening Jan. 31. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Meet Wally Sparks—Rodney Dangerfield stars as a TV-talk-show host, in a comedy that he wrote with Harry Basil. Peter Baldwin is the director. Opening Jan. 31.

Prisoner of the Mountains—A picture inspired by a Tolstoy story, about two Russian soldiers held for ransom by a rebel Muslim in the Caucasus. Sergei Bodrov directed. In Russian. Opening Jan. 31. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Saint Clara—A dark comedy written and directed by Ari Folman and Ori Sivan, in which an Israeli thirteen-year-old (Lucy Dubinchik) discovers that she has clairvoyant powers. In Hebrew. Opening Jan. 29. (Film Forum.)

Shadow Conspiracy—Charlie Sheen, Donald Sutherland, and Linda Hamilton star in George P. Cosmatos's political thriller. Opening Jan. 31. (Cinema II, 84th Street Sixplex, 86th Street East Twin, Embassy 2, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

Waiting for Guffman—Christopher Guest's improvisational comedy, about a small Missouri town preparing a multimedia pageant for its sesquicentennial, stars Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Bob Balaban, and the director (who co-wrote with Levy). Opening Jan. 31.

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 26.)

Albino Alligator—In Kevin Spacey's directorial début, a trio of fleeing bank robbers (Matt Dillon, Gary Sinise, and William Fichtner) invades a bar and makes hostages of the patrons (among them Faye Dunaway and M. Emmet Walsh). (Angelika Film Center, Coronet, and Lincoln Square.)

Angel Baby—Australian writer-director Michael Rymer's début film, about a mentally ill couple (John Lynch and Jacqueline McKenzie) who meet at group therapy and fall in love. (Carnegie Hall Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Beverly Hills Ninja—Chris Farley is an orphan discovered by a Japanese martial-arts master and raised as his successor, in a comedy directed by Dennis Dugan. (Art Greenwich Twin, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and 64th and 2nd.)

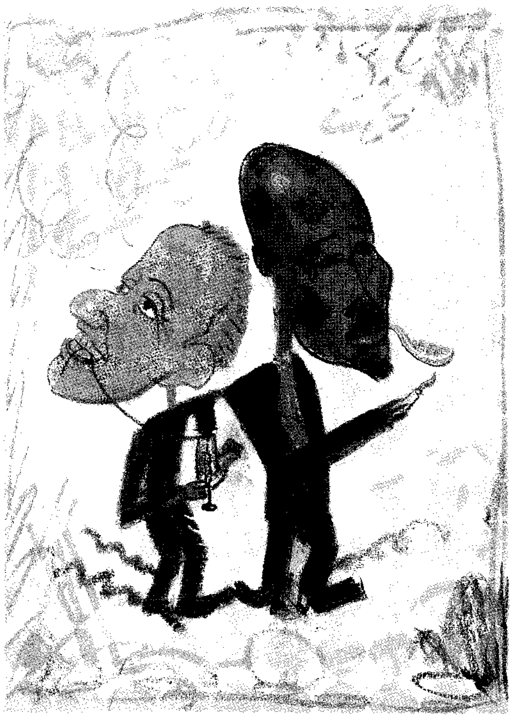
Big Night—The actor Stanley Tucci co-wrote (with Joseph Tropiano), co-directed (with Campbell Scott), and co-stars (with Tony Shalhoub) in this elegant, leisurely low-budget comedy about a struggling Italian restaurant run by a pair of immigrant brothers. The unusually happy, relaxed ensemble includes Ian Holm, Isabella Rossellini, Minnie Driver, Allison Janney, and Campbell Scott. The big set piece—a lavish dinner in honor of the singer-bandleader Louis Prima—is a fitting climax to the movie's patient accumulation of savory and blissfully pointless delights: a convincing illustration of how keen pleasure for pleasure's sake can be.—T.R. (9/23/96) (Cinema 3 and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Breaking the Waves—The Danish director Lars von Trier tells the sad story of a devout young Scottish woman (Emily Watson) who becomes a whore in order to save the life of her critically ill husband (Stellan Skarsgård). Von Trier gives the highbrow audience precisely what it wanted in the art-house boom years of the fifties and early sixties—nudity plus theology. The erotic-metaphysical hokum would be somewhat easier to take if the picture displayed anything resembling a genuine religious impulse.—T.R. (11/18/96) (Angelika Film Center and Eastside Playhouse.)

La Cérémonie—A nasty look at the French bourgeoisie by Claude Chabrol. Jean-Pierre Cassel and Jacqueline Bisset hire the taciturn Sandrine Bonnaire as their new maid; she seems pleasant and efficient, but her good manners conceal dark intentions. She teams up with the local postmistress (Isabelle Huppert, trying hard to be slatternly and annoying), and together they work themselves into a fury. Chabrol's skill is not in doubt here: his camera can still creep and crawl in time with your flesh, and the final twist is a beauty. But, perhaps because the film is adapted from a Ruth Rendell novel, it's surprisingly weak on motive and continuity; there are times when you can neither follow it nor believe it, and the entire cast looks haunted and repressed. Where is the wicked, cool Chabrol of yesteryear? In French.—A.L. (1/20/97) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

The Crucible—Nicholas Hytner's florid, hyperbolic film of Arthur Miller's 1953 drama, about the Salem witchcraft trials, reveals the play as a characteristic product of its time—not so much in its anti-McCarthyism as in its sexual politics. The themes that come through most clearly here are fear of women and hatred of youth: the teen-age girls of Salem squeal and writhe, and the hero, John Proctor (Daniel Day-Lewis)—the manliest man in the colonies—swings from the gallows. Also with Winona Ryder, Paul Scofield, Joan Allen, and Bruce Davison.—T.R. (12/2/96) (Baronet.)

The English Patient—Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, this long and searching movie tangles together a number of stories and characters: Almásy (Ralph Fiennes) and Katharine (Kristin Scott Thomas), who have an affair in North Africa before the Second World War; a French-Canadian nurse (Juliette Binoche) who cares for the badly burned Almásy after the war, and the Sikh soldier (Naveen Andrews) *she* has an affair with; and the mysterious Caravaggio (Willem Dafoe), a scavenging thief who appears to know the secrets of Almásy's



Opening Jan. 31, Tim Roth and Tupac Shakur in "Gridlock'd."

AHMET GÖRGÜN

past. The triumph of the film lies not just in the force and range of the performances but in Minghella's creation of an intimate epic: vast landscapes mingle with the minute details of desire, and the combination is transfixing.—A.L. (11/25/96) (Chelsea Cinemas, Embassy 3, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, and Village East Cinemas.)

Everyone Says I Love You—Woody Allen's latest movie is one of his frothiest, and weirdest, to date: a throwback picture that tries to resurrect the spirit of thirties musicals without recourse to irony. People dance in the streets—a conceit made somewhat simpler by the fact that the streets in question are seldom far from Park Avenue. There is a deliberate roughness to both the singing (which is kind of charming) and the choreography (which is unwieldy and a little graceless). The all-star cast includes a few Allen first-timers, and the plot, as you might expect, is a multiple quest for love. Woody falls for Julia Roberts, Tim Roth seduces Drew Barrymore, Alan Alda tries not to lose control of his family, and so forth; to keep the soufflé from collapsing, Allen throws in a few scenes in Paris and Venice. There is plenty to wince at; the big, splashy numbers don't work as well as the intimate croonings (not least Woody's own timid, barely audible rendition of "I'm Thru with Love"). But who else would dare to make such a film these days? You emerge bemused but undeniably cheered up, partly because of the uncomplicated magic of the climax, in which Woody dances with an airborne Goldie Hawn on the bank of the Seine. It may be a shameless nod to "An American in Paris," but it's the most lyrical scene he's ever filmed.—A.L. (Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 34th St. East, and Village East Cinemas.)

Evita—At last, the rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice comes to the screen. The problem is that it remains a rock opera by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. The fact that it's almost bereft of spoken dialogue is good news for Madonna, who, as Eva Perón, is barely required to speak or even to act. Jonathan Pryce is a sly and troubled Juan Perón, and Antonio Banderas prowls through the action as our friendly smoldering narrator. Alan Parker's picture blares and blazes at you without letup, and it works best when it's openly theatrical—only when it's over do you sense how little lay beneath the busy surface.—A.L. (1/6/97) (Chelsea West, Cinema I, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, and Village Theatre VII.)

Fierce Creatures—John Cleese, Jamie Lee Curtis, Kevin Kline, and Michael Palin in a comedy about a media mogul and a small English zoo. Directed by Robert Young and Fred Schepisi. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, National Twin, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 34th Street Showplace.)

Ghosts of Mississippi—Rob Reiner's bland and punchless film about the efforts of a Southern attorney (Alec Baldwin) to bring the killer of the civil-rights leader Medgar Evers to justice. Baldwin does his usual topnotch work, and James Woods is good (in bad makeup) as the killer, Byron De La Beckwith, but the film is seriously underwritten; the audience never gets a sense of what Evers was like, and, since it took decades to convict De La Beckwith, there's little tension in the story.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII. . . . ¶ Ziegfeld; through Jan. 30.)

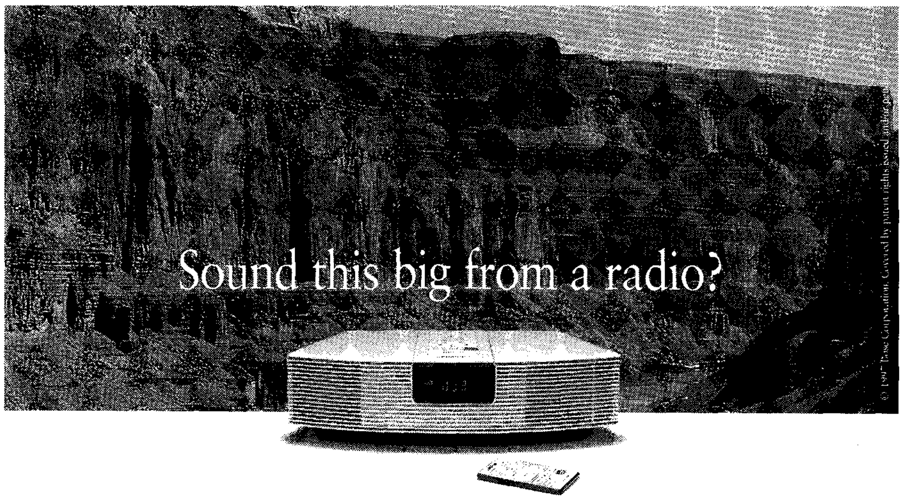
Hamlet—Kenneth Branagh's film uses the full text of the play (the running time is nearly four hours), it's shot in 70 mm., and the approach is daringly straightforward. The director himself plays the unhappy Prince, and so lucidly that every shift in the volatile character's mood seems perfectly natural. Derek Jacobi, as Claudius, and Julie Christie, as Gertrude, are also superb. Also with Richard Briers (Polonius) and Kate Winslet (Ophelia).—T.R. (1/13/97) (Paris.)

In Love and War—During the First World War, a wounded Ernest Hemingway (Chris O'Donnell) is nursed by Agnes von Kurowsky (Sandra Bullock), who became the inspiration for Catherine Barkley in "A Farewell to Arms." Directed by Richard Attenborough. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Criterion Center, Gotham Cinema, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

Jackie Chan's First Strike—A middling Jackie Chan feature, hilariously edited down from its original Hong Kong release and poorly dubbed. The truncated story—it's impossible to follow—seems to concern a nuclear weapon and the C.I.A., but the film exists solely for its action set pieces. Chan's sensationally choreographed fights still ring with humor, and there are some spectacular stunts (one on the ledge of a high-rise that's pure insanity); the star's movements have become so graceful that he can't sweep change off the dresser without inspiring awe. The movie is a disappointment after last year's far superior "Supercop," but for fans of this most artistic of action performers it's still a welcome visit.—B.D. (84th Street Sixplex, State, and Village East Cinemas.)

Jerry Maguire—Tom Cruise plays the title character, who is a glib, cocky agent for professional athletes. In the fluid opening scenes, the movie, which was written and directed by Cameron Crowe, promises to be something unusual—a comedy about the spiritual crisis of a shallow man. But the star quickly reverts to his familiar feisty, can-do shtick, and Crowe loses control of the fragile comic tone. Also with Renée Zellweger, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and Bonnie Hunt.—T.R. (12/16/96) (Criterion Center, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

Kolya—The events following an arranged marriage leave an impecunious cellist (Zdenek Sverak) without his wife but with her six-year-old son (Andrej Chalimon). Directed by Jan Sverak. In Czech. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)



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Marvin's Room—Jerry Zaks's drama (adapted by the late Scott McPherson from his 1990 play) begins with row upon row of pills and potions; if you think you're in for a strength-through-illness picture, you're right. Bessie (Diane Keaton), who spends her time caring for her bedridden father (Hume Cronyn), discovers that she herself has leukemia; the search for a bone-marrow donor leads her to her sister, Lee (Meryl Streep), whom she hasn't seen in twenty years. When Lee arrives with her dysfunctional son, Hank (Leonardo DiCaprio), you just know that Bessie is going to get to work on his functions. The story is meant to be stirring and intense, but the only way to resist the cloying sentimentality is to regard it as an acting workshop: compare and contrast the styles of the hard, hyper Streep and the tender Keaton. Both women give it all they've got, but the film doesn't deserve their generosity. DiCaprio is highly convincing as the young curmudgeon (more so than Robert De Niro as a dotty doctor).—A.L. (1/20/97) (19th Street East 6, 68th St. Playhouse, and Village East Cinemas.)

Metro—Eddie Murphy stars as an arbitrator for the San Francisco Police Department, in a thriller directed by Thomas Carter. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, Orpheum VII, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas. . . . ¶ Embassy 2; through Jan. 30.)

Michael—Holiday candy from Nora Ephron, about a cynical tabloid reporter (William Hurt) who goes to Iowa to cover a story about an angel (John Travolta); it pointlessly reheats half a dozen old screwball and sentimental plots. The one new joke is that this angel is no halo-wearing, harp-strumming innocent: he specializes in fighting and sex. Travolta throws himself into it, but the script is so vulgar and sophomoric that it makes him look like an over-eager first-time actor. Andie MacDowell is the love interest.—S.K. (Beekman, Criterion Center, and 19th Street East 6.)

Mother—Albert Brooks directed, co-wrote (with Monica Johnson), and stars in this comedy, about a writer who's had problems with women and moves back in with his befuddled mother (Debbie Reynolds) in order to discover where he went wrong. The film flounders around trying to make tired points; Brooks gets his fair share of funny asides, but he goes beyond his usual subversive whininess into mean-spirited crankiness—and a lack of generosity is fatal for a comedy that's meant to charm.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street, Lincoln Square, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

The People vs. Larry Flynt—Milos Forman's film chronicles the sexual adventures, medical travails, and legal battles of Larry Flynt (Woody Harrelson)—the creator of the unprecedentedly crude skin magazine *Hustler*—and his raunchy wife, Althea (Courtney Love). For an hour or so, it's a cheerful and unpretentious picaresque comedy, but it turns sentimental and smugly high-minded in its second half: having gone to great lengths to humanize its disreputable hero and heroine, the movie then makes the mistake of trying to canonize them.—T.R. (1/13/97) (Chelsea West, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII.)

The Portrait of a Lady—Henry James's most celebrated novel has become, under the guidance of director Jane Campion and screenwriter Laura Jones, an intense and lengthy monotone. Isabel Archer (Nicole Kidman) arrives in a sombre, repressive England, then travels to an Italy that's not much better; there she marries Gilbert Osmond (John Malkovich), even though anyone in the audience could tell her to steer clear. With Martin Donovan as Ralph Touchett and Barbara Hershey, in what is easily the most potent performance in the picture, as the mysterious Madame Merle.—A.L. (1/6/97) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 34th Street Showplace, and Village Theatre VII.)

Prefontaine—The story of the Olympic runner Steve Prefontaine (Jared Leto), who died in 1975 at the age of twenty-four. Directed by Steve James. (Lincoln Square, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Relic—A strongly produced monster movie (by "Terminator" producer Gale Anne Hurd), with some swanky cinematography by its director, Peter Hyams, and an atmosphere cleverly derived from disaster films like "The Poseidon Adventure." While the acting barely registers (Tom Sizemore and Penelope Ann Miller are the stars), the relentless pacing and the paint-by-numbers plot (a monster is loose in a Chicago natural-history museum) give the film the easy allure of a no-brainer. Hyams wastes time early on with some overdone fright scenes, but the second half of the movie, a non-stop assault by the predator on victims in the locked-down building, succeeds in giving the audience some bang for its buck.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Manhattan Twin, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, State, 34th Street Showplace, and Waverly.)

Scream—An entertaining horror comedy in which the director Wes Craven and his scriptwriter, Kevin Williamson, take the clichés of fright films and reinvigorate them with a cheeky knowingness: the victims are horror-movie aficionados who in many instances make the same mistakes they've joked about seeing made on screen. With help from an unusually strong cast—Drew Barrymore, Neve Campbell, Courteney Cox, and David Arquette all do smashing work—Craven wrings some real thrills from the familiar perils of all those teen-age gorefests.—B.D. (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 62nd & Broadway, and Waverly.)

Shine—The hero of Scott Hicks's absorbing biographical film is the Australian concert pianist David Helfgott (played, at different stages of his life, by Alex Rafalowicz, Noah Taylor, and Geoffrey Rush), who suffered a severe breakdown, spent years in mental institutions, and then, improbably, resumed his career. Although the movie's swiftness and lightness are pleasing, the over-all image they create is indistinct: it just evaporates in your head when the lights come up. Also with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Lynn Redgrave, and John Gielgud.—T.R. (12/2/96) (Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, Lincoln Square, and Murray Hill Cinemas. . . . ¶ Cinema II; through Jan. 30.)

Some Mother's Son—Terry George's political docudrama tells the story of the hunger strike undertaken by Republican—mostly I.R.A.—prisoners in Northern Ireland's Maze (or Long Kesh) jail in 1981. Two of the protesters' mothers, played by Helen Mirren and Fionnula Flanagan, carry the burden of the drama: in their anguished impotence we see the human consequences of their sons' actions and of the British government's callous, intransigent reactions. The script, by the director and Jim Sheridan, is a little cavalier with the facts of the protest, and George's direction is just serviceable; but Mirren and Flanagan are terrific, and the movie, in its blunt, foursquare way, does manage to evoke the tragic insanity of the events. Also with Aidan Gillen and John Lynch.—T.R. (1/27/97) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Thieves (Les Voleurs)—A thriller from André Téchiné, about a French policeman (Daniel Auteuil), his brother (Didier Bezace), the brother's mistress (Laurence Côte), and the mistress's lover (Catherine Deneuve). In French. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.)

Troublesome Creek: A Midwestern—A documentary about an Iowa family and the land they farmed for a hundred and twenty-five years. Written and directed by Jeanne Jordan (the daughter of the last owner) and her husband, Steven Ascher. (Angelika Film Center.)

Zeus and Roxanne—A family adventure about the friendship between a dog and a dolphin, directed by George Miller. Starring Kathleen Quinlan and Steve Guttenberg (as human beings). (Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

ALSO PLAYING

BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD DO AMERICA: Manhattan Twin and State. . . . **CAUGHT:** Quad Cinema. . . . **DAYLIGHT:** National Twin. . . . **101 DALMATIANS** (reviewed in our issue of 12/9/96): 86th Street East Twin. . . . **I'M NOT RAPPAPORT:** Regency. . . . **JINGLE ALL THE WAY:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE LONG KISS GOODNIGHT:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LOOKING FOR RICHARD:** 59th Street East Cinema and Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ONE FINE DAY:** 84th Street Sixplex and First & 62nd Cinemas. . . . **RANSOM** (11/11/96): Embassy 4. . . . **RIDICULE:** Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **SECRETS & LIES:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **SET IT OFF:** Criterion Center. . . . **SLEEPERS** (11/4/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SLING BLADE:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT** (12/9/96): Criterion Center. . . . **SWINGERS:** The Screening Room. . . . **TRAINSPOTTING** (7/22/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TURBULENCE:** Criterion Center. . . . **WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S ROMEO & JULIET:** Worldwide Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th St.
Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
Baronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St.
Coronet, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
86th Street East Twin, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Embassy 1, Broadway at 46th St.
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Guild, 33 W. 50th St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Manhattan Twin, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
National Twin, Broadway at 44th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St.
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
Regency, Broadway at 67th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
68th St. Playhouse, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th St.
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Deadline at Dawn (1946)—A flowery stinker; the patented New York street poetry of Clifford Odets here sounds more like doggerel. A good-hearted dance-hall gal (Susan Hayward) and a philosophical cabbie (Paul Lukas) attempt to clear an innocent sailor (Bill Williams) of murder, often pausing for heavy thoughts—e.g., "Between you and me and the lamppost, happiness is no laughing matter." (As Gerald Weales points out in "Clifford Odets: Playwright," the script is "an anthology of Odets lines past and future"; the happiness quip pops up again in "The Big Knife.") The Group Theatre's Harold Clurman directed—his staging is so on-the-nose that the nose gets a little mashed. With Joseph Calleia, Osa Massen, Lola Lane, and Jerome Cowan. From a novel by William Irish (a pseudonym for Cornell Woolrich).—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 4-5.)

Killer of Sheep (1977)—Charles Burnett's underground masterpiece is a poetic evocation of frustrated energies in and around Watts. The insomniac hero (played stunningly by Henry Sanders) works in a slaughterhouse; counting sheep would remind him of his job. Although his family life teeters on the brink of failure, he somehow preserves his self-respect and the dream that he's getting somewhere.—M.S. (Walter Reade Theatre; Jan. 31 and Feb. 3-4.)

Ossessione (1942)—Despite its hundred-and-thirty-nine-minute length and its banal stretches, Luchino Visconti's variation on James M. Cain's "The Postman Always Rings Twice" is a must-see, for its sweaty, sooty beauty and for its sexiness. Visconti takes Cain's novel of adultery (between a drifter and a roadhouse owner's wife) and murder (of her husband, naturally) and removes the sadomasochism, the purple humor, and the lead-pipe construction. What's left is a story of doomed lovers who see their fate emerging but cannot escape it—like Cain crossed with Emily Brontë. Massimo Girotti has a virile delicacy, and Clara Calamai is what Merle Oberon would have been if she'd had earthiness and fire; when they stare longingly at each other, it's as if their gazes are epoxied. In Italian.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 3.)

Star Wars (1977)—The loudness, the smash-and-grab editing, and the relentless pacing drive every idea from your head, and even if you've been entertained, you may feel cheated of some dimension—a sense of wonder, perhaps. It's an epic without a dream. Maybe the only real inspiration involved was to set its sci-fi galaxy in the pop-culture past, and to turn old-movie ineptness into conscious Pop art. The writer and director, George Lucas, has got the tone of bad movies down pat: you never catch the actors deliberately acting badly; they just seem to be bad actors, on contract to Monogram or Republic, their klunky enthusiasm polished at the Ricky Nelson school of acting. With Carrie Fisher as the princess-in-distress who talks tomboy-tough, Mark Hamill as Luke Skywalker, Harrison Ford as Han Solo, and Alec Guinness as Ben Obi-Wan Kenobi.—P.K. (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Ziegfeld; starting Jan. 31.)

Twin Peaks (1989)—The feature-length pilot of David Lynch's notoriously elusive TV series was also its high point, managing to contain real upset and heartbreak in a form that drops Sherlock Holmes into "Peyton Place." Lynch imbues the discovery of a dead teenage girl in a small Northwest lumber town with a hushed, shocking eerieness; every scene after that mixes absurdity and emotionalism as naturally as if they were the ruling blend in contemporary life (which maybe they are). When Kyle MacLachlan drives into town as F.B.I. agent Dale Cooper, you get to witness a tightrope act done with one of John Cleese's silly walks: in the role of a stranger in a land that's even stranger than he is, MacLachlan puts together combinations of naïveté and authority that would stagger and defeat lesser actors. His Cooper is a portrait of a technocrat to whom nothing human is alien, and nothing inhuman is, either. With Michael Ontkean, Peggy Lipton, Jack Nance, Russ Tamblyn, Joan Chen, and Piper Laurie.—M.S. (American Museum of the Moving Image; Feb. 1-2.)

At the Walter Reade Theatre, Charles Burnett's "Killer of Sheep."

JEROME LAGARRIGUE

The Window (1949)—"The Boy Who Cried Wolf" transplanted to a New York City tenement. Bobby Driscoll plays an imaginative lad who's just trying to sleep peacefully on the fire escape when he sees his upstairs neighbors (Paul Stewart and Ruth Roman) commit murder. Naturally, his parents (Arthur Kennedy and Barbara Hale) don't believe him. The lowdown high concept and the fine eye of the director (Ted Tetzlaff, Hitchcock's cinematographer on "Notorious") earned this tight suspense film its sordid whiff of immortality. "The Window" is to film noir what "Invaders from Mars" is to sci-fi: it brings out the paranoia in even the most sedate children. Mel Dinelli adapted the script from a Cornell Woolrich story.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; Feb. 4-5.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2 and 3, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—**Theatre 2:** A series of film noir based on novels by Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, Cornell Woolrich (a.k.a. William Irish), and James M. Cain. Jan. 29: "After the Thin Man" (1936, W. S. Van Dyke) and "The Glass Key" (1935, Frank Tuttle). . . . Jan. 30: "Fear in the Night" (1947, Maxwell Shane), "The Guilty" (1947, John Reinhardt), and "Fall Guy" (1947, Reginald Le Borg). . . . Jan. 31-Feb. 1: "Mildred Pierce" (1945, Michael Curtiz) and "The Postman Always Rings Twice" (1946, Tay Garnett). . . . Feb. 2-3: "The Blue Dahlia" (1946, George Marshall) and "The Glass Key" (1942, Stuart Heisler). . . . Feb. 3 (evening only): "Ossessione" (†). . . . Feb. 4-5: "The Window" (†) and "Deadline at Dawn" (†). . . . **Theatre 3:** "The Big Sleep" (1945, Howard Hawks), with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, "Walkabout" (1971, Nicolas Roeg), and "Microcosmos" (1996, Claude Nuridsany and Marie Pérennou).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—A program of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German, with English subtitles. Jan. 30 at 2:30 and Feb. 2 at 5: "Rio das Mortes" (1970). . . . Jan. 30 and Feb. 3 at 6: "Whity" (1970). . . . Jan. 30 at 8 and Feb. 2 at 2: "The Niklashausen Journey" (1970). . . . Jan. 31 and Feb. 4 at 2:30: "The American Soldier" (1970). . . . Jan. 31 at 6 and Feb. 3 at 2:30: "Beware of a Holy Whore" (1970). . . . Jan. 31 at 8 and Feb. 4 at 6: "Recruits in Ingolstadt" (1970). . . . Feb. 1 at 2: "Merchant of Four Seasons" (1971). . . . Feb. 1 at 5: "The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant" (1972). . . . ¶ A selection of films admired by Fassbinder. Feb. 1 at 2:30, Feb. 2 at 5, and Feb. 3 at 3: "Band of Angels" (1957, Raoul Walsh). . . . Feb. 1 at 5, Feb. 2 at 2:30, and Feb. 4 at 3: "Accatone" (1961, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian). . . . Feb. 3 at 6: "The Exterminating Angel" (1962, Luis Buñuel; in Spanish). . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 3 and 6: "White Hotel" (1995, Tobi Solvang and Dianne Griffin). . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 3: "Strange Victory" (1948, Leo Hurwitz). . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 6: "The Workers Film and Photo League" (1931-34). . . . ¶ Jan. 31 at 8: "40,000 Years of Dreaming—A Century of Australian Cinema" (1996, George Miller).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Jan. 29 at 2, 4, 6, and 8, and Jan. 30 at 2, 4, and 9: "A Tickle in the Heart" (1996, Stefan Schwietert). . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 6:30: "Hit Me" (1996, Steven Shainberg). . . . ¶ A program of films by Charles Burnett. Jan. 31 at 2 and 6:15, Feb. 1 at 6:30, Feb. 2 at 6:15, Feb. 3 at 8:15, and Feb. 4 at 2 and 8: "Nightjohn" (1996). . . . Jan. 31 at 4 and 8:15, Feb. 3 at 2, 4, and 6:15, and Feb. 4 at 4: "Killer of Sheep" (†). . . . Feb. 1 at 4 and 8:30: "My Brother's Wedding" (1984). . . . Feb. 2 at 4 and 8:15: "To Sleep with Anger" (1990). . . . Feb. 4 at 6: "Bless Their Little Hearts" (1984). . . . ¶ Feb. 1-2 at 2: "Groundhog Day" (1993, Harold Ramis).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by David Lynch. Feb. 1 at 2: "The Elephant Man" (1980). . . . Feb. 1 at 4:30 and Feb. 2 at 5: "Twin Peaks" (†). . . . Feb. 2 at 2: "Dune" (1984). . . . In the Nam June Paik Video Viewing Room, the episodes of "Twin Peaks" which Lynch himself directed are being shown. Through Jan. 31: Episode 1. . . . From Feb. 1: Episode 2.

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—Feb. 4 at 7: "Weekend" (1967, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . Feb. 4 at 9:15: "Red River" (1948, Howard Hawks).

Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363)—Through Jan. 30: "Angel Dust" (1994, Sogo Ishii; in Japanese). . . . From Jan. 31: "Angel Dust" and "Le Doulos" (1962, Jean-Pierre Melville; in French), with Jean-Paul Belmondo.

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St.—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Feb. 2 at 7, the feature will be "Back Street" (1961, David Miller).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Jan. 29 at 7: "Shadows" (1959, John Cassavetes). . . . ¶ Jan. 29-31 at 8, Feb. 1-2 at 3:30 and 8, and Feb. 3-4 at 8: "Ulysses' Gaze" (1995, Theo Angelopoulos). . . . ¶ Jan. 30 at 9:30: "The Man Who Left His Will on Film" (1970, Nagisa Oshima; in Japanese). . . . ¶ A program of films by Mike Leigh. Jan. 31 at 10: "Naked" (1993). . . . Feb. 1 at 6: "Life Is Sweet" (1991). . . . Feb. 3 at 9: "Abigail's Party" (1977). . . . ¶ Feb. 1-2 at 4: "2 x 50 Years of French Cinema" (1995, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . ¶ Feb. 4 at 9: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French).

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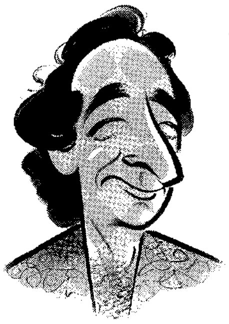
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

O.J. WITHDRAWAL


Harry Shearer

THE wrongful death civil lawsuit against O. J. Simpson goes to the jury this week, and many reporters who have been covering the case for the past two and a half years regard the impending end of the trial as a deliverance. Not Harry Shearer, who has been giving on-line reports about the trial for *Slate*. In a recent dispatch, Shearer referred to Item 47, a bit of evidence he called "one of the well-known blood drops." Among his generally exhausted and fed-up colleagues in the Simpson press corps, only Shearer can still muster the enthusiasm to distinguish the renowned blood drops from their more obscure cousins.

Shearer is not only the most zealous Simpson civil-trial chronicler but the most unlikely one as well. His normal life is that of a comedian, which is why he described the testimony of the criminalist Dennis Fung as a "cringe-a-thon." Throughout three decades of intermittent prosperity, he has written or appeared in some of the strangest and most influential movies of the period: Albert Brooks's "Real Life," which he co-wrote, and the parody documentary "This Is Spinal Tap," in which he played Derek Smalls, one of the addled rock musicians. Seven years ago, Shearer found the steadiest paycheck of his career when he created the voices of Mr. Burns and several other characters on the cartoon hit "The Simpsons."

Shearer lined up an assignment to cover the case not only for *Slate* but also for Santa Monica's public-radio station. The civil trial has been perfect for him; instead of concentrating on the grand themes of race, class, and gender, it has focussed on the quirky details of privileged L.A. lives. Shearer was probably the only journalist, for example, to note that Simpson had testified that during his divorce hearing with Nicole "every day, when we left court, she and I would go have sushi together." In his column Shearer observed, "Whatever else you can say about the Simpsons' divorce, it was cliché California."

Though fifty-three years old, Shearer looks like a scraggly puppy. "I am profoundly uninterested in crime stories," he said during a break in last week's summations. "I don't watch the local news. But reality on TV does suck me in. The Watergate and Iran-Contra hearings mesmerized me, because you could see character play itself out in real time. The same thing happened when the O.J. preliminary hearing came on. I was hooked." Of Kato Kaelin's return to the witness stand, Shearer wrote, "He's here, and he's fun, and he's a blonde again."

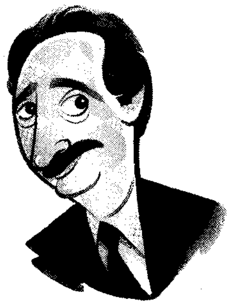
Shearer feels melancholy about the impending end of his idyll. "I don't think we'll see a picture like this of life in L.A., of how Brentwood works, ever again," he said. "When O.J. testified, there was a very subtle and really bizarre idea underneath it all. The idea was, his golf game was going great and he was making more money than he ever did in his life. He led a life without any meaning or passion. The goal-line stand was that this man was too shallow to be a killer." Shearer paused. "He reminds me of a lot of people in show business."

THE REGULAR

LAST week, on Martin Luther King Day, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani visited a Harlem church and got heckled. The Reverend Al Sharpton announced that he would be running against the Mayor, and sang out, "I *believe* I can *fly!*" And Fernando Ferrer, the borough president of the Bronx, quietly explained to a modest crowd of black firefighters in Brooklyn why *he* should be the city's next mayor.

Ferrer, who is announcing his candidacy this week, does not believe he can fly. Standing at a lectern in the Vulcan Society's meeting room on Eastern Parkway, in Crown Heights, Ferrer recalled having watched Dr. King on television as a teen-ager. "You could feel the rush of emotion, I know, that came over me," he said, somewhat confusingly. The firefighters listened impassively. "It's a real rush of emotion," Ferrer added.

Ferrer has just begun to take his show on the road, and the kinks are still visible. The Borough President is a boyish character of forty-six with thinning hair, a mustache, and glasses, and a Bronx, rather than a Puerto Rican, accent. Ferrer is a second-generation New Yorker. He often recalls that his grandmother scrubbed floors, but it may be more to the point that his mother was a volunteer with the Pondiac club, a venerable neighborhood arm of the Democratic Party. Ferrer plunged into Party activity almost immediately after graduating from New York University. He ran an unsuccessful campaign for State Assembly in 1974, became district leader of his local club in 1978, won a City Council seat in 1982, and was elected borough president five years later.


Fernando Ferrer

In classic New York political parlance, Ferrer is a "regular." His nonsectarian politics, like his indistinct ethnicity, are essential to his political appeal. His advisers, in fact, are hoping to market Ferrer as an "outer-borough Catholic" in order to cut into the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC PALMA

Mayor's chief voting bloc. At the same time, as the leader of a rising class of Puerto Rican officeholders who now dominate politics in the Bronx, he can lay claim to a very specific community of voters. But Ferrer also knows that he can't win unless he wrests a significant chunk of the black vote from Al Sharpton and from Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messinger, his chief Democratic opponent. He, too, had visited black churches that day. And he spoke to the firefighters as "a person of color." He agreed that the other Democratic challengers shared his belief in affirmative action, but he added that only "a couple of us" would be able to talk about such issues "with a special passion."

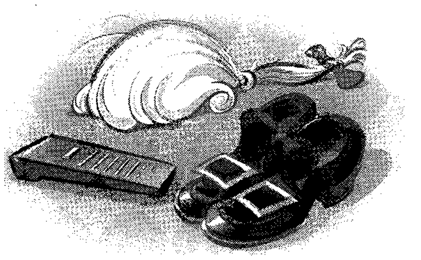
Despite the electoral math in his favor, Ferrer has had trouble being taken seriously as a potential mayor. Last year, Ed Koch put out his personal list of promising candidates; Ferrer's name wasn't on it. The current conventional wisdom is that even though Ferrer has a slightly better chance than Ruth Messinger of winning a general election, Giuliani, who is widely credited with not only lowering the crime rate but standing up to some of the city's entrenched bureaucratic interests, will beat either one.

Heading back to the Bronx after his speech, Ferrer said, his voice rising as he turned in the front seat, "What's frustrating is, people said, 'Ferrer can't raise any money.' O.K., I disproved that. 'Ferrer can't get any support outside the Bronx.' I disproved *that*." He insisted that he could beat the Mayor, by focussing on the idea of "opportunity"—education and job creation. He conceded, "You have to make an incredible demonstration that you will be as tough on crime as Giuliani was." But unlike many Democrats, Ferrer pointed out, he had long supported the Mayor's crackdown on quality-of-life crimes. He added, "I don't foam at the mouth, but I am a competent manager."

BEFORE THE BELTWAY

A REPORTER who has attended thirteen Presidential Inaugurations, starting with F.D.R.'s first ("The only thing we have to fear . . ."), decided to take a long view of this year's proceedings in Washington by seeing how things were going in Williamsburg, the capital of the royal colony of Virginia, back in 1776:

Stepping forth from the lobby of the Williamsburg Inn and heading for Duke of Gloucester Street, I feel quite out of place in a tweed jacket and gray slacks among all the women in hoopskirts and the men wearing knee breeches and silver buckles on their shoes. Seen Thomas Jefferson lately? I ask a woodworker, who is in a shop making mahogany secretaries. "Saw him last week," the man replies. "Also James Madison. Jefferson rents local rooms when he's away from Monticello, and likes to hoist a glass or two." George Washington been around? I ask a mobcapped lady at the Royal Governor's Palace, where I notice that all the spoons are turned upside down for a formal dinner. "Seen him!" she says. "He can crack a walnut with one hand." She lowers her voice. "I'm told he enjoys gambling at the Raleigh Tavern."



At the offices of the *Virginia Gazette*, I chat with a lean, scholarly-looking editor, Mr. William Hunter. Mr. Hunter is a dedicated Tory. He has nothing but contempt for the upstarts who opposed his sovereign, George III, with "that wretched Boston Tea Party." I ask him if he's heard of Newt. "Newt?" he says, peering at me with incredulity. "I know of no Newt, sir. Do you speak of the newt referred to in the Scottish play by Shakespeare, the play whose title we dare not even say, for fear of a curse? *That* newt was part of the fetid and poisonous potion tossed into the witches' cauldron."

At the King's Arms Tavern, I dine on Sally Lunn bread, oysters, and chicken pot pie. The next morning, I return to the *Gazette's* offices. This time I meet the editor of a rival *Virginia Gazette*—Mr. Alexander Purdie, an angry Scot from Edinburgh. He launches into a diatribe against the ministers of the King, whom he describes as abjectly stupid fellows with no feeling for the Colonies or their problems. "Do you know a Mr. William Hunter?" I ask. Mr. Purdie turns purple, then green, then bright red. "I never speak ill of any man," he says. "But that Mr. Hunter—I find it hard to control myself. Hunter is hopeless. And a Virginian by birth! Incomprehensible." He begins to lose control again, on the subject of the tea tax and the stamp tax. "That East India Company, sir," he splutters. "First tea is taxed, then fabrics. They put one foot in the door, and before you know it they have occupied the entire house!"

A bit farther along Duke of Gloucester Street, the House of Burgesses is meeting in solemn session. Many of the bigwigs are somewhere else today—Jefferson is in Philadelphia, working on the Declaration of Independence, while Washington has his hands full, fighting the British in New York. But the burgesses defiantly and unanimously declare Virginia independent of the Crown.

Reality calls. William Jefferson Clinton is about to take the oath of office. I watch his Inauguration on something called "television" in the comfort of my hotel room, then celebrate the peaceful continuity and transition of power by walking back to the King's Arms Tavern and ordering a cup of thick fish chowder, with toastlike rectangular breads known as "sippets." Nothing to it. You just dip a sippet into the soup, and sip. Clearly the act of a free man.

TENTACLES DIVINE

JUST when you thought you could imagine all the desperate things an aspiring model might do in pursuit of an eye-popping portfolio, Joe Auricchio calls from Queens to talk about a nude session involving body paint and Emily Dickinson. It began at the Heartland restaurant and brew pub, in Union Square, when Auricchio, an unknown twenty-four-year-old, was maneuvering a tray of suds past Susannah Sayler, a waitress. Sayler, who is also a photographer, shouted something about a "full frontal" she was doing for a SoHo artist named Lesley Dill, who needed a model. Would he be interested? Auricchio said yes, because he was hurrying to collect a tip. Two weeks later, he showed up at Dill's loft, where he was greeted by the artist, Sayler, and three assistants.

When Auricchio told Dill that he felt uncomfortable, she pointed, for reassurance, to her work on the walls. What Auricchio saw were life-size photographic images of naked men and women decorated with the poetry of Emily Dickinson. "I didn't know anything about Emily Dickinson," he says. Dill told Auricchio that a friend had given her an anthology of Dickinson, which had sparked powerful visions. That was how she'd got the idea of covering naked people with the poet's best bits.

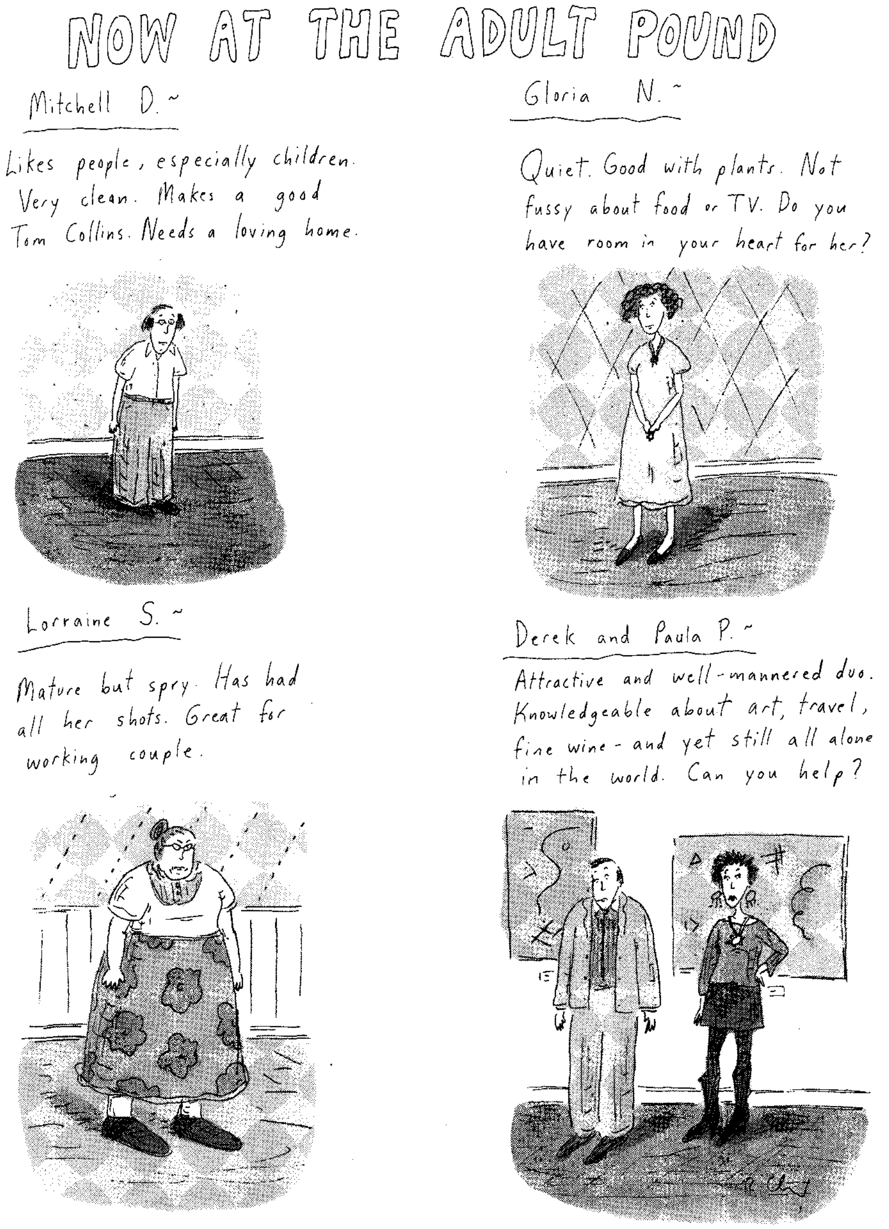
Auricchio felt a little more comfortable when Dill handed him a sheet of paper with a poem on it. "It wasn't like I was posing for some nudie magazine," he says. Under the words "Dickinson Number 1175" the poem read:

> We like a Hairbreadth 'scape
> It tingles in the Mind
> Far after Act or Accident
> Like paragraphs of Wind
> If we had ventured less
> The Breeze were not so fine
> That reaches to our utmost Hair
> Its Tentacles divine.

Auricchio walked into the studio in his Fruit of the Looms. Dill and her assistants soaked towels and sponges in white body paint and went to work on a base coat. It was cold, Auricchio recalls, really cold. Once the paint's alcohol base evaporated, though, the goose bumps disappeared, and he decided that he didn't mind several pairs of female hands rubbing him all over. When Dill got to his waist, he obediently dropped his underwear. "I didn't feel violated," he says about the painting of his private parts. "She asked if I wanted to do it myself, but I was, like, 'You've got the rag, you do it.' "

Getting the whole poem on Auricchio took two and a half hours. Finally, when the last of his toes were lettered, he faced Sayler's camera. At Dill's command, he curved his body into a crescent, tensed his shoulders, and threw back his head. For the final pose, he squatted and spread his knees. For some reason, he thought about his dead grandmother. "Giuseppe," he heard her saying. "Giuseppe, what are you doing? That's disgusting!"

Back in Queens, he looked over a set of contact prints. "The first frame, that smile, it's just me, Joe," he says. "After that, I was Lesley's work."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YOB YADHTRIB

One morning recently, four-year-old Adam Litt put his shoes on backward and insisted on going to school that way. When he tried the same thing the next day, his mother, Elizabeth, who is a psychologist, dissuaded him by suggesting that he wear his shoes backward at his upcoming birthday party instead. Things escalated when Adam decided that he wanted his *entire* party backward. A few weeks later, on a Saturday morning, eleven children arrived at the Litts' apartment, on the Upper West Side, for Adam's Backward Birthday Party. Many were wearing their clothes backward.

"Goodbye, everybody," Adam said.

"Goodbye," they answered as they came inside.

After everyone had settled down, Elizabeth led the children through a round of Take the Tail Off the Donkey. ("You get to keep the tail," she said.) Then she supervised some backward painting, which wasn't really backward, if you thought about it. After that, she told the story of "Pigs Little Three," which began with "The end" and managed both to preserve and to subvert the original narrative. The wolf sucked in air. Houses in ruins came back together. When it was time to eat, cake was served before pizza, and "You to Birthday Happy" was sung.

"Is there ice cream?" one child asked.

"I couldn't figure out how to get it hot enough," Elizabeth answered.

Things soon reverted to a more conventional four-year-old's birthday party. There was cake on the floor, fighting over balloons, and mothers telling children, "That's *not* O.K." Adam, meanwhile, had retreated to a corner of the sofa. Perhaps, as a good contrarian, he was a little bummed out to see his private obsession coöpted. After all, if your mother says it's *O.K.* to be backward, then what's the point, right? Adam, in fact, wasn't wearing his shoes backward. He wasn't wearing anything backward at all—at least, not that anyone could see.

"Only my underwear," he finally admitted. ♦

"O.J. Withdrawal," Jeffrey Toobin; "The Regular," James Traub; "Before the Beltway," Philip Hamburger; "Tentacles Divine," Ted Katauskas; "Yob Yadhtrib," Bob Morris.

Your Funny Valentine

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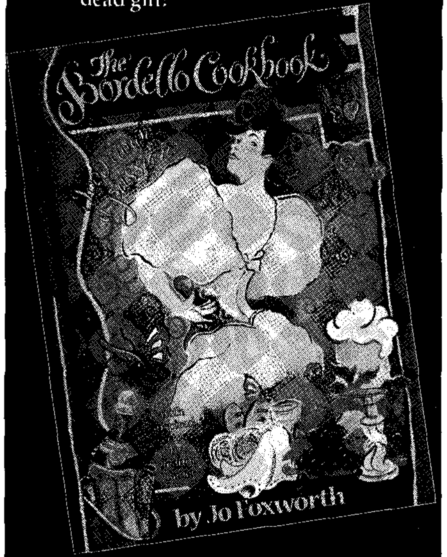

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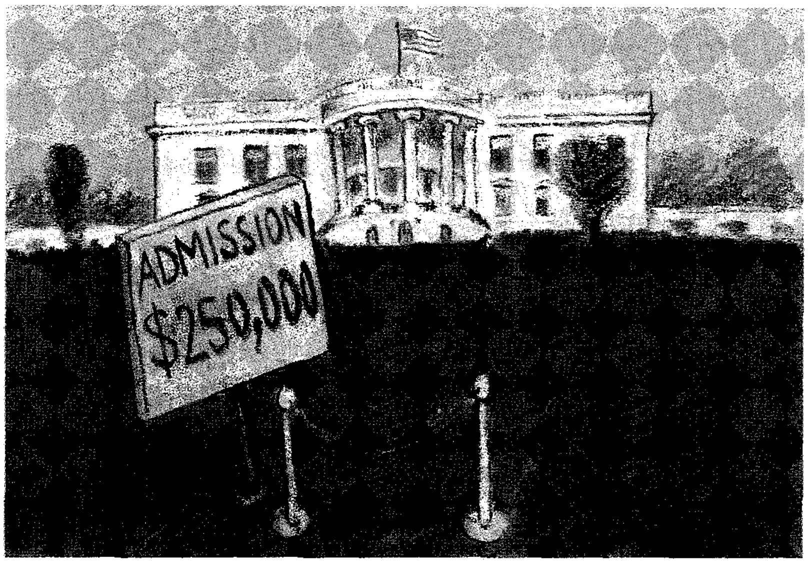
THE POLITICAL SCENE

INSIDE THE MONEY MACHINE

How the Democrats went wild.

BY JANE MAYER

On the muggy afternoon of Saturday, June 22, 1996, a crowd of ordinary Americans lined up outside the White House, waiting patiently for the standard tour. Meanwhile, inside, a smaller crowd of somewhat less ordinary Americans was gathering for a somewhat less standard tour. Both sets of people were excited about what they would experience, but their expectations were notably different. The outside crowd was looking forward to shuffling awestruck through the State Dining Room, the East Room, and the other ceremonial chambers of the executive mansion. The inside crowd had been promised much more: a leisurely look at the West Wing, including the Oval Office; an opportunity to wander the White House grounds, play tennis on the White House court, take a dip in the White House pool, and bowl a few frames in the White House lanes; and, best of all, a friendly, informal barbecue with the President and the First Lady.



AHMET GÖRGÜN

There was another difference between the two tours: while the standard one was free of charge, the nonstandard one was originally intended as a lure for persons who undertook to give the Democratic Party two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—the largest sum ever assessed for attendance at a political event. The thought was that a participant could either donate the entire amount or raise it in smaller quantities from others. Soliciting a campaign contribution on federal property is unlawful, but the event's organizers apparently reasoned that nothing was amiss: after all, no one would actually be asking for money within the White House gates.

Even at a time when the faces of both major political parties have been disfigured by money, this event—described as a Day at the White House—was, perhaps, a marketing concept too far. Like the Victoria's Secret diamond-encrusted brassiere, which last Christmas repelled as many catalogue-browsers as it dazzled, a Day at the White House was both tacky and costly—and, as a product, something of a flop. According to one Democratic Party official, of the "maybe twenty" people the event attracted, only a handful qualified as major donors. One such was Arthur Goldberg, the president of gaming operations for Hilton Hotels, whose casino interests were threatened by new regulatory proposals in Congress. (Goldberg told me recently that he didn't recall any particular price tag for the day, and he added that his wife, who was unavailable when we talked, had made the arrangements. "She told me we were going," he said. "She's the boss.") But much of the crowd consisted of Party functionaries and nonpaying, or lesser-paying, guests.

One major Democratic contributor, who was asked to come and was also asked if he could think of any other couple who might like to come along for an additional two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, said that he was "flabbergasted" by the invitation; he was put off by the notion of essentially renting the White House for a day to the super rich. "We just said no, thanks." Others, such as Paul Montrone, a New Hampshire businessman and a major Party fund-raiser who helped with the event, have refused to comment. "Mr. Montrone has absolutely no interest in discussing it," a spokesman said.

The event itself was not without glitches. Although some guests, such as Arthur Goldberg, said they enjoyed lounging beside the White House pool, the weather was too hot and humid for tennis. The noxious weather also broke up the barbecue: diners were shepherded indoors. Some guests found consolation in a preview screening of what would become the summer's biggest hit movie, "Independence Day," shown in the Family Theatre and attended by several of the movie's stars. But President Clinton turned up late, and he was uncharacteristically out of sorts. He seemed preoccupied by the day's negative news stories, which included an attack by Bob Dole on the White House's possession of F.B.I. files on prominent Republicans. "People didn't get as much time with him as they had hoped," one Party official acknowledges. According to another, the guests were back outside the White House gates by nine.

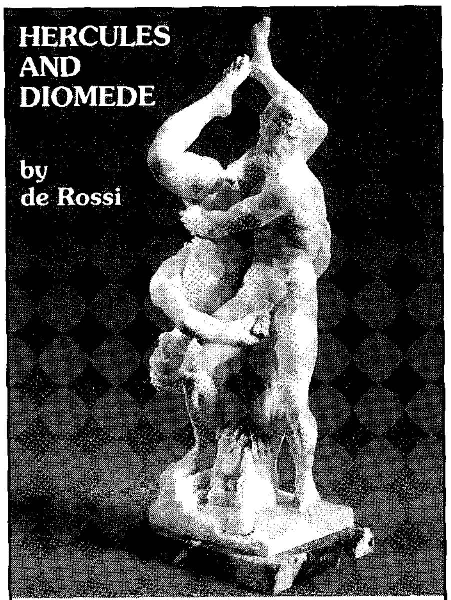
DETAILS of such events at the White House are just beginning to surface, but already it is clear that, in the course of raising money for the most expensive political campaign in history, the White House marketed the prestige and glamour of the Presidency as never before. Clinton campaign officials have denied some of the more embarrassing stories, such as nights in the Lincoln Bedroom being auctioned off to the highest bidders; actually, they say, the bedroom was used only by friends of the President—many of whom were heavy financial supporters. "It's an urban myth, like alligators in the sewers," Amy Weiss Tobe, the spokesman for the Democratic National Committee, has said.

Nevertheless, a few alligators were spotted nestling under Lincoln's sheets. One major contributor who spent the night there, and who declines to be named, says that he had met Clinton in passing, but before he stayed overnight the President "didn't have the slightest idea who I was." As this contributor sees it, he was invited not because he was a friend, which he wasn't—or even because they shared mutual interests, which they did—but simply because he was rich.

Harold Ickes, Clinton's former political point man in the White House, explained that, rather than asking for a contribution up front, they used the Lincoln Bedroom to entice potential donors. "It's quite seductive to be invited to a state dinner and stay overnight—especially with this President, because he'll come up at midnight and give you a tour, and talk with you about anything you have the remotest interest in."

Such unabashed salesmanship undoubtedly helped to raise enormous sums of money, but there was a high political cost. Voters who saw Clinton as a populist were apparently repelled by his courtship of wealthy contributors. Late last September, as news broke of questionable campaign donations, Clinton's lead over Bob Dole dwindled, and the Democrats lost any chance of recapturing the House of Representatives. Clinton was especially embarrassed by reports of hundreds of thousands of dollars of potentially illegal foreign contributions, many of them solicited by an acquaintance, John Huang, vice-chairman of finance for the Democratic National Committee. Last week, the President endorsed a number of reforms announced by his party, including limits on the size of contributions and a ban on all gifts from noncitizens, but even as he did so federal inquiries about donations to the Democratic campaign were continuing.

IT wasn't supposed to be this way. In Bill Clinton's 1992 campaign manifesto, "Putting People First," the candidate lamented, "On streets where statesmen once strolled, a never-ending stream of money now changes hands—tying the hands of those elected to lead." In his first Inaugural Address the President promised to "reform our politics so that power and privilege no longer shout down the voice of the people." But shortly after he took office the leaders of Capitol Hill's then Democratic majority, whose active support Clinton needed in the coming battles over the budget and over health care, quietly let it be known that they would not



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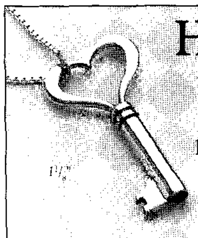

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welcome a major push for campaign-finance reform. Republicans were even less enthusiastic. In short order, Clinton dropped the issue from his list of legislative priorities.

The mystery is how a President of such avowed reformist intentions wound up at the center of a fund-raising scandal. So far, Clinton himself has given few explanations, and he has downplayed the seriousness of allegations of impropriety. What blame there is, he has suggested, lies not with him but with the Democratic National Committee. Yet it was Clinton who chose the top officers of the D.N.C., and he picked some of the most successful exemplars of the culture against which he had ostensibly declared war. Inside the D.N.C., one top official says, "Don't kid yourself—Clinton was pushing as hard as anyone. This was his White House, and his baby."

Clinton has denied that donors influenced Administration policies in any way. But perceptions matter, too. "The White House says that there was no quid pro quo, but who believes them?" asks Roger Witten, a partner at the Washington law firm of Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering, who, as a former assistant special prosecutor in the Watergate case, was present at the creation of the current campaign-finance laws. Whether or not corrupt practices took place, he argues, the supposition that they did "has an equally corrosive effect on our democracy. People lose faith, get apathetic, and think only fat cats, big corporations, and big labor have a say." Even some of Clinton's closest confidants concede that corruption is endemic in both parties. "The whole system is horrible," George Stephanopoulos, the former Clinton aide, told me recently. "The problem is that you can't help having your perspective shaped by the people you talk to. And access comes from money." Witten worries that twenty-five years after Watergate "we're exactly where we began."

An understanding of what happened in the most recent Presidential election begins with a loophole in the 1974 campaign-finance laws. By law, corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals may spend unlimited sums on so-called "party-building activities." As a result, there has been an explosion in the amounts collected by the two parties. Last year, according to federal records, this "soft money," as it is called, reached two hundred and sixty-seven million dollars for both parties combined, more than tripling the amount raised in the previous Presidential election year. Even before the final campaign costs are tallied up, the election of 1996 is being touted as the first billion-dollar election in American history. (As of the last filing period, the Republicans had reported spending about five hundred and fifty million dollars, and the Democrats about three hundred and sixteen million.)

"I have in mind a V-chip to be implanted directly in children."

Complicating the picture for the Democratic Party is a history of financial inferiority. The campaign-finance reforms that followed Watergate evened things out for a few years (and helped Jimmy Carter win election in 1976), but by 1980, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the growth of conservative political-action committees, the Democrats were once more financially overwhelmed.

It was the Democrats, alarmed at the disparity, who, beginning in 1979, led the effort in Congress to permit soft-money contributions, with the idea that donations from labor would make their party more competitive. They spoke of encouraging, at the state level, grassroots Party activities, such as organizing volunteers and printing bumper stickers. But the reality, which the Republicans quickly grasped, was that a sluice for unlimited individual and corporate political expenditures had been opened, in effect legalizing the kind of private spending that had horrified the nation during Watergate. For the Democratic Party, it was a huge miscalculation: the Republicans' traditional corporate base gave them an even greater financial edge than they'd had before.

Republicans have also, on the whole, been far more ingenious about marketing. Despite the recent uproar over the Lincoln Bedroom, it was the G.O.P that first formalized the old-fashioned business of trading money for political access. As far back as 1975, the finance chairman of the Republican National Committee invented the Republican Eagles, which promised club members access to Presidential gatherings at the White House, among other events, in exchange for a ten-thousand-dollar campaign contribution. And although former Reagan Administration officials insist that fat-cat sleepovers at the White House would never have been permitted—the former Reagan aide, Michael Deaver protests, "God, no! It's unthinkable!"—fund-raising literature from that period promised donors of twenty-five hundred dollars a chance to meet the Reagans "personally" and wander through "the entire second floor of the White House."

By 1988, when George Bush and Michael Dukakis were competing for the White House, the price of admission had climbed steeply. Bush's finance chairman, Robert Mosbacher, who was later named Commerce Secretary, came up with something called Team 100: to join, two hundred and forty-nine individuals each contributed a hundred thousand dollars to the Party. The Democrats responded in kind, with Dukakis's friend and fund-raiser Robert Farmer creating a hundred-thousand-dollar club of his own.

For some donors, giving brought satisfactions more palpable than the warm glow of doing the right thing. After Bush was elected, eight members of Team 100 were made ambassadors. Four years later, a study by Common Cause, the campaign-finance-reform group, found that members of Team 100 and their companies had enjoyed "a clear pattern of favorable government treatment," ranging from a thirty-five-million-dollar federal-construction grant to the quashing of a criminal investigation of what was alleged to have been a fraudulent fifty-million-dollar tax write-off.

Recent allegations that the Clinton Commerce Department favored big donors in its trade missions appear to apply to the G.O.P. as well. The 1996 brochure for Team 100, which, like the Eagles club, is still flourishing, promised numerous chances not only to meet with the highest-ranking Republican officials, including past and potential Presidents; it also promised participation in "international Team 100 business missions," in which meetings would be arranged with "some of the highest-ranking government and business officials" abroad.

Faced with this formidable history of wealthy and well-organized opposition, Clinton nonetheless experimented briefly after his 1992 election with the notion of devising a more populist approach to funding the Democratic Party. He placed at the helm of the Party his relatively obscure campaign manager, David Wilhelm, then thirty-six years old. Wilhelm wanted to put an end to soft money. He wanted to wean the Party from its wealthy and corporate sources of funds and, as he told me recently, to "broaden and decentralize the base." His plan was to aggressively seek small donations from middle- and working-class people, in an attempt to copy the Republicans' success with direct-mail operations.

The experiment was a disaster. By the end of 1993, Wilhelm had raised nearly nine million dollars in "non-itemized" contributions—that is, contributions of less than two hundred dollars—but the effort had cost the Party eight million dollars in direct-mail expenditures. By the end of 1994, the D.N.C. was at least four million dollars in debt. On Election Day, when Republicans took control of the House and Senate, Wilhelm was sent packing.

IT has often been observed that after the 1994 congressional defeat Clinton began his politics of "triangulation," emulating Republican positions. But it is less well known that from that point on he emulated the G.O.P.'s political machinery as well. The person he tapped to be his campaign finance chairman in early 1995 was Terence McAuliffe, a fabled fund-raiser.

If David Wilhelm seemed a clueless outsider, Terry McAuliffe was already such an insider that not one but two caricatures of him adorned the walls of the Palm, a Washington steak house favored by political operatives. McAuliffe, a boyish thirty-nine, is high-spirited, boisterous, and able to laugh at his own hucksterism, drawing others in with a wink. The Macker, as he sometimes calls himself, sends out more than five hundred drugstore valentines each February—not just to such doyennes as Pamela Harriman, the United States Ambassador to France, but also to the all-important secretaries whom he needs to put through his calls (and whose names he always remembers). McAuliffe has stressed that he had no role in soliciting any foreign contributions.

McAuliffe has been raising funds for the Democratic Party almost since the Watergate reforms were enacted. He became Carter's top fund-raiser in 1979, at the age of twenty-one, and his mentor in this arcane game was the former California congressman Tony Coelho, who, more successfully than any other figure in Democratic politics, had unabashedly built a duplicate of the Republicans' soft-money machine. In the mid-eighties, Coelho transformed the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which he chaired, into a giant fund-raising mill, in which House members were marketed to lobbyists in almost every way imaginable, right down to thousand-dollar drinks with Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill. As Coelho's finance chairman, McAuliffe, fresh out of Georgetown University Law Center, was at his elbow every day, taking the names and keeping the tallies. Some purists complained that the largely corporate clientele that could afford to participate in such a cash-driven system was

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increasingly pulling the Democratic Party away from its traditional political loyalties.

McAuliffe cultivated a raffish image: he once famously wrestled a Florida alligator in exchange for a fifteen-thousand-dollar check made out to the Democratic National Committee. Between campaigns, he grew impressively prosperous, in part by alchemizing his political connections into business ventures. He became chairman of the board of a small Washington bank that was known for making loans to Democratic politicians. In 1988, the bank made a loan of a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars to Richard Gephardt's Presidential campaign; at the time, McAuliffe was Gephardt's top fund-raiser. Democratic rivals complained, whereupon McAuliffe said that he had abstained from voting on that particular loan. After Clinton was elected, McAuliffe landed a Presidential appointment to serve as American commissioner-general to a 1993 trade fair in Korea. The Washington *Post* reports that his current business interests, about which he is guarded, include a home-building firm, a title-insurance firm, and a mortgage-servicing firm, all based in Orlando, Florida.

In December of 1994, when Clinton asked McAuliffe to take charge of the finances of the reëlection effort, McAuliffe is said to have asked for only one thing in return: access. Bob Woodward, in his book "The Choice," recounts a breakfast meeting at the White House between McAuliffe and Clinton a couple of days after Christmas. McAuliffe now declines to discuss his fund-raising role, but, according to Woodward, he promised the President that, despite all the Democratic Party's troubles—its congressional defeat, its low morale, and its difficulties in finding a new chairman (the post was eventually filled jointly, by Senator Christopher Dodd, of Connecticut, and Don Fowler, the Party chairman in South Carolina)—he would raise money faster than it had ever been raised before. "Is there anything I need to do?" a relieved Clinton asked, according to Woodward. "Sir, I need to get people to see you," McAuliffe answered.

By early 1995, McAuliffe was occupied full time raising "hard" money for the Clinton-Gore campaign. His goal was to accumulate forty-three million dollars within just eight months—the maximum amount that he calculated was allowed under federal statute. Since no more than a thousand dollars could be solicited from an individual donor, McAuliffe's task was a gruelling one—a desperate, flat-out, twenty-four-hour-a-day scramble for small increments of cash. But when it came to massaging big donors he was peerless. It was McAuliffe, several colleagues say, who dreamed up the Day at the White House, and more often than not it was he who arranged other perks, too.

At the D.N.C., meanwhile, there was an equally high-pressure chase for soft money. To lead it, Clinton picked for the unpaid position an old hunting buddy, a multimillionaire Texas oilman named Truman Arnold, who had helped him financially since his run for attorney general of Arkansas, in 1976. The President may still have been talking publicly about campaign-finance reform, but his choice of Arnold for D.N.C. finance chairman spoke quite a different language.

On being rousted out of the duck blinds, where he had been getting in some late-season shooting this year, Arnold told me that part of his job, as he saw it in 1995, was to soothe major donors who had felt slighted during David Wilhelm's populist interregnum. At least half a dozen hundred-thousand-dollar donors "hadn't even been written a thank-you note," he explained. "It was just poor social graces."

Having made a fortune estimated at more than a hundred million dollars from, among other ventures, a chain of full-service filling stations called Road Runner (known for serving chicken fingers along with the gas), Arnold set out to make the Democratic Party more shopper-friendly. "If you were selling insurance, you'd have a playbook," he said. The Republicans, he knew, had their Eagles club, with promised access to top government officials, including the President. "We had a brochure from the G.O.P., and we virtually copied the format. I wanted some sort of consistency about it," he said, so that donors all over the country would know what they could expect to get for their money, and so that they would all be treated the same, whether they were friends of the President's or not. "I didn't want the people in L.A. to get better access than the oil jobbers in Texas," he explained.

In the early summer of 1995, the D.N.C. produced a brochure to be sent to all prospective contributors. In contrast to the Republican efforts, which had mixed promises of Presidential access in with other perks, Arnold's menu spelled out exactly how many dollars would buy a meal with the President or the Vice-President.

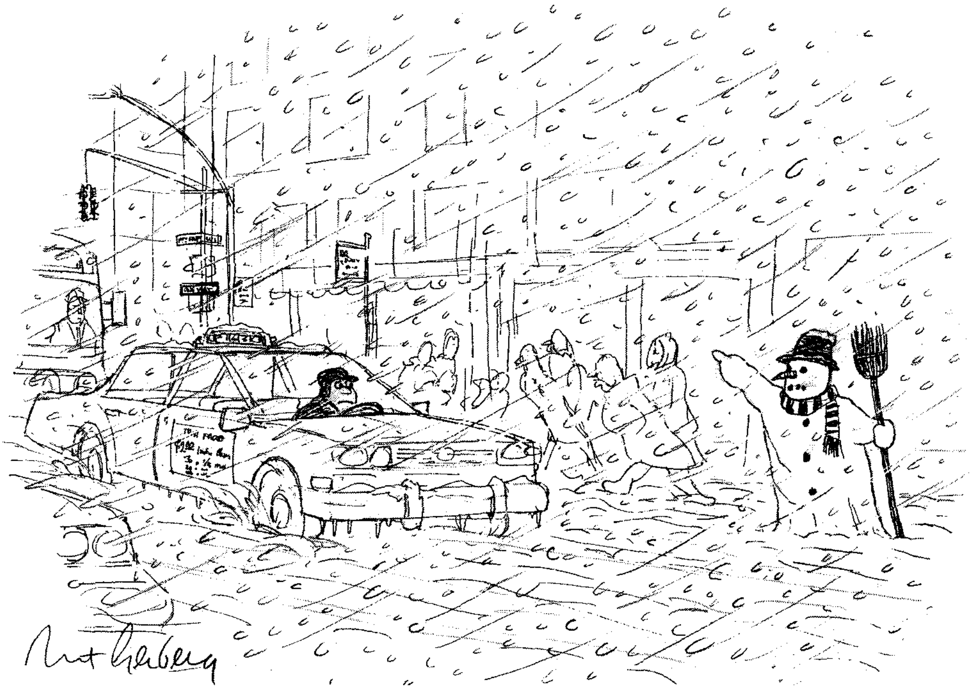
"I didn't think of it as influence peddling," Arnold said, in his slow twang. He recalled that he'd told his staff at D.N.C. headquarters, "We pimp for nobody—but we will be great concierges." For instance, he said he told donors, "If you want to go to a state dinner, we will put your name in play." As for the Lincoln Bedroom, he went on, there was never a charge up front—it was more of a special enticement. "I've been in sales all my life," he said, and concluded, "It's a bit like romance. You go out to dinner, and if everything feels right you proceed to the good-night kiss—or the Lincoln Bedroom."

Such frankness plays better in Texarkana than in Washington. When reports surfaced that Clinton was selling access to himself in a campaign brochure, a furor arose in the press. The President ordered that the brochures be recalled, and rebuked his old friend. The issue was style, not substance: Arnold had been too blunt. Besides, Arnold now says word of the brochure "came out at a time when the President was talking about campaign-finance reform. I guess it sounded hypocritical."

Arnold found he didn't much enjoy the relentless business of fund-raising. After five months at the D.N.C., he sold the two-and-a-half-million-dollar Kalorama Circle mansion that he and his wife had bought for their Washington stay, and headed back to the family ranch. But his "concierge service" continued to function.

When Arnold left the finance post, in July of 1995, it was not easy to find another unpaid volunteer to replace him. Several estimable Democratic business leaders—including Ian Cumming, of the Leucadia National Corporation—declined. Clinton made the demands of the job harder still when he decided—also in the summer of 1995, more than a year before the election—to authorize a massive advertising campaign, on the advice of Dick Morris, his outside political consultant.

Both McAuliffe and Harold Ickes had argued that the ads would be too costly,



but Clinton overrode their concerns. Having seen his health-care proposal defeated two years earlier, in part by an advertising campaign, he was determined this time to dominate the airwaves. The costs, though, were staggering. The constant polling and media buys alone came to a million and a half dollars a week—an expense that the Clinton-Gore campaign soon shifted over to the D.N.C.

At the rate that they were going, Ickes told Clinton in early 1995, he would have to help raise as much as two hundred and twenty-five million dollars that year, a hundred and thirty million of it to be spent on the Presidential race. Put another way, it would cost the Democrats about six hundred and sixteen thousand dollars every day to stay competitive with the Republicans. Clinton's mouth dropped open, according to a witness. But he nonetheless embraced the plan. The upshot, a senior White House official says, was that inside the boiler room of the D.N.C. "it was breathtaking—it was brutal."

Finally, in September of 1995, after a three-month search during which the D.N.C.'s finance operation had been largely staffed by college students, a new candidate presented himself for the finance chairmanship: Marvin Rosen, a Miami bond lawyer.

Officials in the White House, many of whom had met Rosen in Democratic fund-raising circles over the years, were aware that he had been implicated in a failed S. & L.—a potential liability, given the Whitewater affair. He had been personally named in a civil suit by the Resolution Trust Corporation in connection with his work as a lawyer for a major thrift in West Palm Beach which had failed. (Rosen denied any wrongdoing, but in 1992 his firm agreed to pay eight million dollars in a settlement with the government.)

In hiring Rosen, Clinton appeared to have come full circle—from decrying the culture of lobbying to hiring one of its most hard-driving practitioners. For Rosen, government-bond work depended on his relationships with government officials and, not surprisingly, he had nourished those relationships over the years with sizable cash contributions. At the time that he put himself forward for the D.N.C. job, Rosen's Miami law firm, Greenberg Traurig, had just opened a Washington office and was looking to expand its lobbying business in town. Rosen is close to a number of Washington political figures, such as Senator Edward Kennedy. Among those the firm hired were Senator Kennedy's wife, Victoria, and Commerce Secretary Ron Brown's son Michael. D.N.C. colleagues soon suspected that Rosen hoped to use the access given to him by his Party post as a business boon.

According to several witnesses, Rosen would attend top-dollar Clinton fund-raising events and solicit business for his own firm when the President was out of the room. Edward Faberman, a lawyer who at the time was American Airlines' vice-president for government affairs, recalls one such event when Rosen, who had done some legal work for the carrier, circulated through the room a number of times, saying, "Hey—I can help you with So-and-So in Washington." Then, according to others, he'd pass out his business cards. Both Party officials and donors were discomfited enough by Rosen's pitches that they complained to the White House. Counsellor to the President Doug Sosnik acknowledges that he received "a couple of complaints" about Rosen's conduct, but he prefers not to comment.

One big Democratic donor asserts that Rosen offered to set up a meeting with a Cabinet member and boasted that the Secretary and he socialized all the time. "Have you been invited to watch a movie at the White House?" the donor recalls Rosen asking him and other businessmen at a ten-thousand-dollar-a-plate Presidential dinner. "No problem. I can get you in." Then, says the donor, came the business card.

Rosen denied soliciting clients at D.N.C. functions. "I categorically reject the allegation that I used that position, or even attempted to do so, for personal gain," he told me last week. If he passed out a business card, he says, it was with his D.N.C. phone number on it. And he said he had "no recollection" of ever having told any client that he could help him gain access to Administration figures, although he did acknowledge that at least one Cabinet officer—Federico Peña, the Transportation Secretary—"is someone I know and I'm friendly with."

By the time that John Huang appeared on the scene, the line between commerce and politics was blurred. Huang was a relatively obscure Commerce Department figure with longtime ties to Clinton; backed by the White House, he had persuaded Rosen to appoint him to the post of D.N.C. vice-chairman of finance. Huang quickly showed that he could raise millions of dollars from a new ethnic constituency—Asian-American—sometimes by offering a prospective donor the chance to be photographed with the President. If some of the money was contributed illegally by foreigners—or raised improperly in religious settings, such as a California Buddhist temple—who was going to object? The electoral imperative was to raise the great sums of money that are needed to win the White House, and Bill Clinton's fund-raisers understood that their most valuable commodity was the President. ♦

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LIFE AND LETTERS

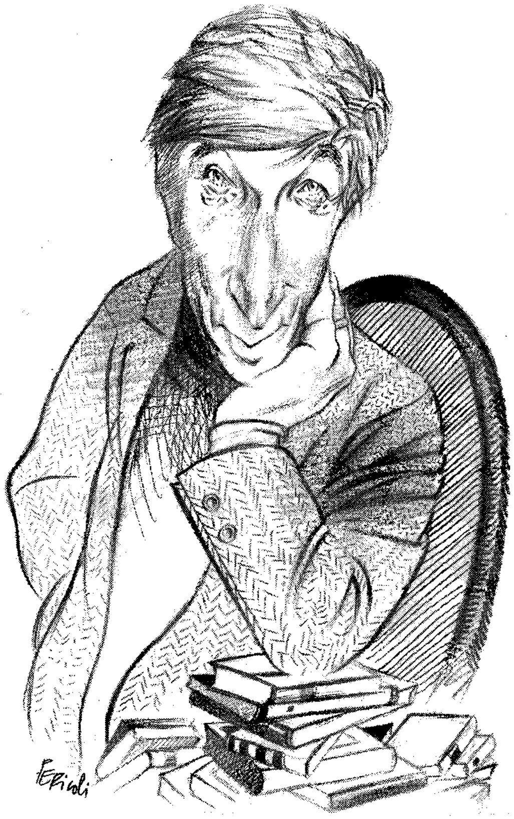
ME AND MY BOOKS

How did they assume a life of their own?

BY JOHN UPDIKE

THERE is a moment in the movie "Lawrence of Arabia" when a tiny black dot on the shimmering desert horizon slowly enlarges into a galloping sheikh, played, if memory serves, by Omar Sharif. A book you write is like that—a small vibrant blur that gradually enlarges into a presence, preferably dashing and irresistible. When people ask me how many books I have written, they may think I am being coy when I say I do not exactly know. But do I count just the forty hardcover volumes that the obliging firm of Alfred A. Knopf has published? What about the five slim books for children, and the out-of-print paperback "Olinger Stories," or the peculiar but precious quasi novel entitled "Too Far to Go" in this country and "Your Lover Just Called" in Great Britain, containing linked short stories not all of which have appeared in other collections? And what of the many limited editions, binding together material, often, that is not between hard covers anywhere else?

The bookmaking process—fussing with the type, the sample pages, the running heads, the dust jacket, the flap copy, the cover cloth—has perhaps been dearer to me than the writing process. The latter has been endured as a process tributary to the former, whose envisioned final product, smelling of glue and freshly sliced paper, hangs as a shining mirage luring me through many a gray writing day. The moment when the finished book or, better yet, a tightly packed carton of finished books arrives on my doorstep is the moment of truth, of culmination; its bliss lasts as much as five minutes, until the first typographical error or production flaw is noticed. One collection of stories, "Pigeon Feathers," had developed in the printing too narrow a top margin, and another, "Problems," too exiguous a bottom margin. The jacket I had designed for "The Coup," based upon a photograph of Timbuktu's boxy dried-mud houses, had been spurned by higher-ups as making it look too much like a nonfiction book, and the solid-green jacket achieved as a compromise became, thanks to a tinting effect of the coated stock, not at all the clarion green I had seen in proof. Such inevitable blemishes, though extraliterary, inaugurate my estrangement from the book, which becomes distasteful to me before its life with the public has so much as begun.



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TULLIO PERICOLI

print trade, by inexorably mixed reviews, by blushing interviews with the giddy author, is brutish and short. Very quickly the book, scarcely news in the first place, becomes old news. Seeing an unbought stack glimmering pathetically in a window, the author averts his eyes and, like the bad Levite in the parable of the good Samaritan, passes by on the other side. The books call out with little surface details—a title type once fervently debated, a topstain tenderly selected—for a recognition now stonily denied. Soon, like a chorus of cries from a sinking ship, the books die away; they eddy into the back shelves of bookstores, and thence into the mountainous return piles, to reappear a year or two later in the discount catalogues and in a paperback version. The royalty statements, by the time they appear, are like shreds of wreckage which float to the surface of a cruel, inscrutable sea.

And yet the books do not quite vanish. The author retains some copies, and spies others in the homes of his children and his friends, where he has bestowed them. Occasionally he sees a stranger scowling into one on an airplane or in a hospital ward. My instinct is to tear the book from the reader's hands; I wonder if this reaction is abnormal or generally shared within the neurotic literary profession. One has sought this silent intimacy and then is shocked by it; it seems so naked and out of control. The stranger, with his or her grimy fingers and glassy gaze, is so clearly *not* the ideal reader, all-forgiving and miraculously responsive, whom I vaguely courted as I wrote. My sly, greedy wish to have my books bought and read cannot stand up to even a little experiential reality.

ONCE a year, I do duty at a church book fair, and stand amid table after table, receding to the horizon, of the discarded works of John P. Marquand, Thomas B. Costain, A. J. Cronin, Mary Ellen Chase (who gave my first novel a generous review, ages ago), Pearl Buck, Frank Yerby, John Gunther, Hendrik Willem Van Loon, and those innumerable others who, in the long middle of our finally terminating century, studded the best-seller lists and the sunporches, bedrooms, and dens of the local bourgeoisie. Death and demolition have released these books from the crannies of their sequestration. A few of my own yellowing titles crop up among them; their purchasers, startled to find me alive and standing there, ask me to sign them, and thus I touch for a moment, as they surge toward me and then away again, battered copies of "Couples," rubbed and rain-damaged "Rabbit"s, and foxed, dog-eared "Witches of Eastwick"s, the diabolic purple I chose for the cover cloth faded by the passing years to an innocent mauve. These books of mine have been through the mill. They have travelled in the ill-mapped wilderness of the reading public. Their scars of use shame me. While I cowered unseen, these books bravely ventured forth and took their chances.

The literary business, with its fitful attempts to imitate the vastly better-financed glamour of the movie and television and music businesses, comes down to books, the humble, durable dregs of reading. My wife has taken up genealogy, and at her side I visit in summertime the small towns of Connecticut and New York. She gravitates to the local-history section of the trim little libraries of brick and ironstone, and I drift into the general stacks, sneakily seeking out, between the massed best-sellers of Anne Tyler and Leon Uris, my own tomes. There are usually a few there, some written so long ago that my connection to them seems grandpaternal. The condition of their spines, and the dates stamped on the checkout cards, tell me more than I want to know about my readership or lack of it. Some, usually those written when I was young—"Rabbit, Run," "The Centaur," "Pigeon Feathers," with its pinched top margins—have worn enough to win a staid, stamped second binding. On one steel shelf, in a Hudson Valley town with its own tributary creek gurgling over a dam and under a bridge near the library door, I saw that "S.," in its saucy pink cloth, had a spine distinctly more aslant than the others: it had been read more. The reviews, as I recalled, had been sour; there had been feminist muttering, though I had put my heart and soul into my heroine, who leaves her posh home for a raffish ashram. The publisher had evinced high hopes for sales; the generous first printing had proved to be more than enough. Here, years later, while water audibly rushed over the nearby dam, none of that seemed to matter. What mattered was that, to judge from the book's condition, the readership of this small town, mostly female, as readership is everywhere, had recognized in "S." my attempt at a woman's book, a book for women. A sort of blessing seemed to arise from the anonymous public; I had been, mutely, understood.

Meanwhile, the books multiply. Foreign editions, revised editions, paperbacks in a new format all come to the door and beg to be cherished. My own books have crowded all the others out of one room and have pressed on into another. Boxes of them weigh down the attic joists and molder in the basement and the barn. Their swelling bulk threatens to push me away from the point of it all. The thin edge of the wedge—my very first book, just barely a book, a collection of mostly light verse, with its thrifty pale-gray boards and black spine—had a bright purity slowly swallowed by the subsequent thickening. In the backward glance, I tend to lose sight of content and, asked to name favorites, think most fondly of those volumes that, like "Hugging the Shore" and "Buchanan Dying," came out especially well, to my mind, as examples of book production—good margins, nice cover, pleasant heft.

A master set of the forty Knopf hardcovers sits in a polychrome row opposite my desk. They are stripped of their jackets and marked up with typos and second thoughts toward some ultimate perfected edition. Somewhere in their several million pondered, proofread, printed words I must have done my best, sung my song, had my say. But my panicked awareness, as the cutoff age of sixty-five approaches, is of all that *isn't* in them—almost everything, it suddenly seems. *Worlds* are not in them. In the face of this vacuity arises the terrible itch to—what else?—write another book, a book that, like one more ingredient sprinkled into a problematic batter, will make the whole thing rise. The little black dot on the horizon begins to quiver. Squinting, I can almost see the jacket, and make out the title page, in thirty-six-point Perpetua. ♦

THE CULTURE INDUSTRY

THE AGE OF UNREASON

Welcome to the factual free-for-all.

BY KURT ANDERSEN

WHAT did he know, and when did he know it? During the late-modern era of journalism and popular thought, which achieved its apotheosis in Watergate, those were the salient questions. A consensus about facts prevailed, along with a kind of common-sense faith that the accumulation of facts would yield something like truth. The postmodern period began in the eighties, with the American religious deliriums, in both fundamentalist-Christian and New Age forms, and with the indulgence of the imaginary anecdotes of Ronald Reagan and Tawana Brawley; it achieved its apotheosis in O. J. Simpson's acquittal. The salient questions in this new era tend to be epistemological: What do you think you know, and why do you think you know it?

Consider the major news stories of the last year. We don't know who was responsible for the epidemic of black-church arson, or even if there was an epidemic. We don't know why T.W.A. Flight 800 blew up. We don't know who planted the pipe bomb at the Olympics in Atlanta. The biggest news stories degenerate into contentious unsolved mysteries, each an argument against the efficacy of facts and the possibility of truth. Again and again, facts—arson, plane crash, bomb—are supplanted by controversies over how the stories were reported and who believes which versions of reality. We are left with proliferating parallel universes. So Representative Maxine Waters suspects that the C.I.A. was behind the crack trade in South Central Los Angeles; Pierre Salinger suspects that Flight 800 was hit by an American missile; and Dan Burton, the new chairman of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee, suspects that Vincent Foster didn't really kill himself in the park where his body was found—make that "found." Where there's a fact vacuum, pseudo facts, opinion, and outright fantasy come rushing in. When the White House earlier this month issued a book-length report on allegations of wrongdoing by the Clintons and Clintonites, the point was not to refute the substance of the charges but to analyze how spurious charges filter from the margins into the élite press, frequently via the Internet—more epistemology.

Of course, Americans are *supposed* to mistrust élite authority and to believe that every citizen is entitled, above all, to his or her own opinion. Until the late nineteenth century, moreover, that populist doctrine accorded with the way information flowed: the "media" were scattered and local. Then the steady march toward centralization gradually made information and opinion the province of mass-circulation magazines, wire services, radio, and, ultimately, networks and national newspapers. For better and for worse, the American journalistic century devolved from the muckraker to the pundit to the anchorman—Steffens to Lippmann to Cronkite. But the old native antipathy toward élite authority was never rooted out, and after getting amped up during the late sixties and the seventies it is driving today's trans-ideological, my-facts-are-as-good-as-your-facts skepticism.

Sometimes the skepticism is justified. Even science often seems irresolute, arbitrary. During the last election campaign, polling was way off the mark: the final New York Times/CBS News survey before the election overestimated President Clinton's margin by a hundred per cent. In December, the four big television networks declared that they no longer trust the accuracy of the Nielsen ratings, which are the foundation of the entire TV business. And a federal commission discovered that inflation had been inaccurately measured for years, yet it could only approximate by how much the rate was being overstated—maybe thirty per cent a year, maybe sixty per cent, maybe somewhere in between. If a technical story is scary enough, there's a good chance that it will be published with its premises essentially unchecked; and, the

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scarier it is, the greater is the chance of its being picked up widely.

The first great parental panic of the postmodern age was missing children—a putative rash of kidnappings by pedophiles and killers. After the murders of twenty-three black children in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981, and, later in 1981, the abduction and murder of Adam Walsh, in Florida, magazines, newspapers, and broadcasters began asserting routinely that many thousands of American children were being snatched by strangers each year.

Élites are out, grassroots make-believe is in.

BRIAN CRONIN

Missing children quickly became a movie-of-the-week social issue. The Reagan Administration established the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Children's faces appeared on milk cartons. The annual number of kidnappings was by this time pegged in the media at twenty thousand, or fifty thousand, or, sometimes, even a hundred thousand.

In 1984, I was a writer at *Time*, working on a missing-children story. I did some simple arithmetic. If the low-end national figure was true, it meant that in New York City alone a dozen children per week were disappearing. It seemed improbable to me that in a city with two tabloid dailies such a story had escaped notice. I called half a dozen urban police departments around the country, more or less at random, and asked each one how many cases it had had in the previous year of children abducted by strangers. One here, none there, a couple in the next place. By extrapolation, it seemed clear that the correct national number was possibly in the hundreds, certainly not in the thousands, let alone in the tens of thousands. My editor, however, declined to go ahead with such a wildly skeptical story by a nonexpert—a story that he seemed to think would have looked niggling and callous. (It turned out that the figure of fifty thousand had been invented by Adam Walsh's father in the weeks following his son's death; according to the current *Washington Monthly*, Walsh has since said that the number was a "guesstimate.")

Time also figured in that decade's other great social panic, cocaine use. One particular cocaine factoid cropped up repeatedly in the mid-eighties—the assertion that every day five thousand Americans were trying cocaine for the first time. In 1987, it had been among the official data presented at a meeting of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Then, in 1988, an article in *Science* on drug-abuse statistics attempted to track down the source of the five-thousand-new-coke-users-a-day number. *Science* reported that, "according to the best recollection of the writer who compiled these data for NIDA," the statistic had appeared in 1984 and was based on five hundred calls to a New Jersey cocaine hot line. But, in exposing the factoid as squishy, *Science* seems to have got the provenance wrong. The statistic first appeared, I believe, in an April, 1983, cover story in *Time*. I wrote the story and I invented—no, constructed—the statistic: taking a credible 1982 estimate of Americans who had used cocaine and subtracting from it the comparable 1980 estimate, I divided that number by seven hundred and thirty (three hundred and sixty-five days times two) and arrived at . . . about five thousand new users a day. It may have been true, or anyway true-ish, but its genesis bears out *Science's* finding that "many of the numbers are soft."

No wonder the idea of truth seems so slippery just now. If good faith and cool heads can let facts go astray, what happens when more tendentious or paranoid versions of reality leach into the mainstream? We're perpetually warned about the contemporary rise of cynicism, but a parallel American contagion, often infecting the same citizens, is credulity. The postmodern cynic cum naïf mistrusts the government, the media, and the other élites even as he recklessly embraces this or that line of grassroots make-believe. You believe that a majority of women were sexually abused as children? You believe that Ben Franklin was an anti-Semitic propagandist? You believe that you have seen a documentary videotape of government doctors performing an autopsy on a captured extraterrestrial? Whatever.

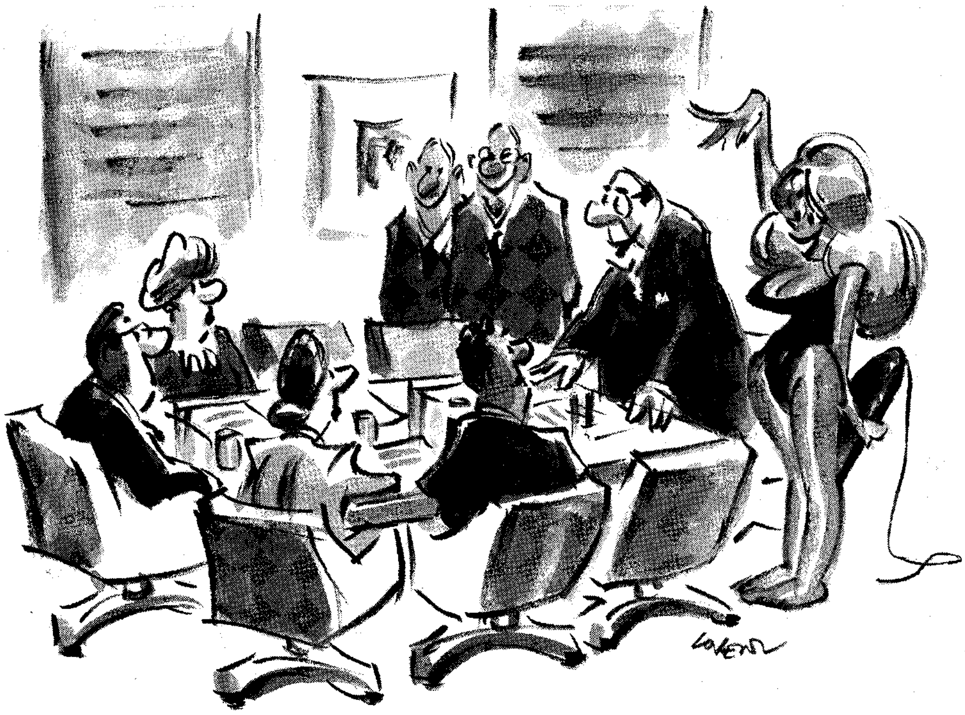
THIS laissez-faire ultra-populism finds its perfect medium in the Internet. Not only is every citizen entitled to his or her opinion but he or she is entitled to deliver it instantaneously, studded with chunks of fake information, to the whole world. With a computer and a phone line, anyone can become his own publisher/commentator/reporter/anchor, dispatching to everyone everywhere credible-looking opinions, facts, and "facts" via the Internet. On the World Wide Web, for instance, the site at www.all-natural.com contains dozens of dense, competently written reports on subjects as various as the Hale-Bopp comet, AIDS, and T.W.A. Flight 800, and its frequently updated pages look as professional as those of brand-name news-media sites; the articles assert, however, that the comet may be travelling alongside "a gigantic spacecraft," that H.I.V. grew out of a "U.S. biowarfare program," and that Flight 800 was brought down by "a rift in the space-time continuum." Thanks to the Web, amateurism and spuriousness no longer need look amateurish or spurious. If society's susceptibility to misinformation is like AIDS, then Web sites and Internet news groups and electronic bulletin boards—a vast, thrilling, promiscuous commingling of facts with fabrications—could be its bathhouses.

"You see, I'm not a person who looks into the Internet," Pierre Salinger assured me last month. Salinger was for most of the last two decades a senior ABC News correspondent and investigative reporter and then, until 1995, vice-chairman of the P.R. firm Burson-Marsteller. But the Net and its wide-open marketplace of ideas and information remained alien territory to him.

Sometime last fall, he says, he was given a document by "a top intelligence agent in France, a guy who's been a fantastic adviser to me." The document began, "TWA flight 800 was shot down by a U.S. Navy Aegis missile fired from a guided missile ship which was in area W-105 about 30 miles from where TWA 800 exploded. W-105 is a Warning Area off the southeast coast of Long Island and is used for military operations including missile firing." It continued for five hundred more words, thick with knowledgeable-sounding analysis and technical detail. And so, on November 7th, in a lecture-circuit speech in Cannes to members of an airline-industry association, Salinger declared unequivocally but without elaboration that Flight 800 had been shot down by a Navy missile, and that the United States government was covering up the truth.

Ron Dunsky, a CNN producer who was assigned full time to the Flight 800 story, reached Salinger late that night. "He was awake, and he was very excited by the information he had, and I asked him to read me the document," Dunsky recalls. "I recognized it immediately. I pulled out my document, and I went over it paragraph by paragraph. He said, 'That's it! That's the document! Where did you get it?' " CNN had got it as a fax almost two months earlier, and had then found virtual clones all over the Internet; the original was the speculative E-mail scenario of a retired airline pilot in Florida.

When Salinger finally looked into the postings on the Internet, he was impressed to find "*forty pages* of material" on Flight 800. To Salinger, the Net postings were encouragement to stick to his guns. Dunsky and his colleagues at CNN had nearly the opposite reaction. "We were getting annoyed at the persistence of this rumor out there," Dunsky told me recently. "It was almost like this parallel universe." Certainly the logic and the language of Salinger's document are typical of on-line paranoia: "Notice that the FBI is always standing beside or behind Mr. Francis"—Bob Francis, a spokesman for the National Transportation Safety Board—"and it would appear that his job is to make sure that nothing is said that would give away 'THE BIG SECRET!' "



"And now I'd like you to join me in welcoming to the board Arne Savin from Morgan Stanley, Chet Bentson from Bankers Trust, and Tempest Dawn from 'Baywatch.' "

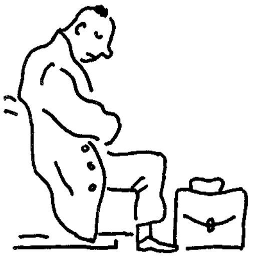
Last summer's series in the San Jose *Mercury News* on the links between the C.I.A. and Nicaraguan cocaine wholesalers is a very different case. The newspaper story was extensively reported and was probably true in many of its basic facts—that is, some Contras were probably involved in the cocaine trade, and people on the C.I.A. payroll probably looked the other way. As with Salinger, however, it posited an unholy federal conspiracy. And, as with Flight 800 fabulism, the story swelled with populist affirmation while circulating via the Internet and talk radio, especially among black Americans. In that parallel universe, where rumors of fantastic plots by government (a satanic Ronald Wilson Reagan—six letters, six letters, six letters—had crack invented as a genocidal weapon against blacks) are widely credited, a crack-dealing C.I.A. can seem not just plausible but obvious.

Of course, counter-realities flourish in Malibu as well as in Compton. Oliver Stone, as both a director ("JFK," "Nixon") and, lately, a producer ("The People vs. Larry Flynt"), has spent as much time as anybody alive fending off charges that he twists facts. He is still pained by the intense criticism—the factual criticism, not the film criticism—that he gets for his historical movies. "I raised questions in 'JFK,' " he told me recently. "The movie never said we had the answers. It deconstructed history, if you will. The Warren Commission is the myth, my movie was counter-mythology. We're not allowing for dissident thought."

We aren't? With the Internet, the Oliver Stones of the world now have their own homeland. They may be subjected to an extra dose of scrutiny, but that is the price of being a dissident. Unorthodoxy isn't supposed to get a free pass. And, as we gear up to live in a hyper-democratic media world crawling with contagious falsehoods, society will need a robust information immune system.

It looks as if we might be developing one. The Pierre Salinger misadventure sounds like a parable about our vulnerability to pseudo facts, but it contained a self-correcting happy ending. In the following days, every relevant agency and expert dismissed Salinger's story, and there were no takers among the rest of the old media—not even the New York *Post*. Nor is the affair an indictment of the new media; mostly what it reveals is one cocky old-media cowboy's cluelessness about the new frontier of the Internet.

That once-untamed territory is being rapidly civilized. The mountain-man and homesteading eras have passed, and sheriffs and schoolmarms have come to impose law and order. On the twenty-first-century Internet, as in the nineteenth-century American West, the mavericks and cranks drawn to the frontier will not be wiped out, and their romantic sensibility will inform the spirit of the place, but the rude settlements and wild behavior are being overshadowed by more traditional, trustworthy modes. Each year on the Net is equal to about a decade in nineteenth-century-frontier terms: the rise of Internet news groups and bulletin boards is analogous to the half century after Lewis and Clark; the beginning of the World Wide Web, in the early nineties, can be compared to the discovery of gold in California; and the present cyber-moment is equivalent to, say, 1880.



As far as the ongoing spew of digital information is concerned, certain brand names, some familiar but some strictly new-media, are coming to be seen as reliable. Americans may temperamentally resist following orders from headquarters, but they still have a weak spot for experts. *Slate*, the Microsoft webzine, just inaugurated "The Tangled Web," a section devoted to policing on-line conspiracy-mongers. Brooke Shelby Biggs, a media critic for *HotWired*, an Internet epicenter of don't-fence-me-in libertarianism, posted a commentary last month pining "for a filter that can help the public separate the bunk . . . from mostly accurate news sources."

After four years of unchallenged legitimacy, the bogus missing-children statistics were exposed, by a Denver *Post* series that won a Pulitzer Prize. In the academy, the cachet of the multiple-truth postmodernists seems to have peaked around 1994. The C.I.A.-Contra crack story was overplayed, but, again, the immune system responded: "EVIDENCE IS LACKING OF ALLEGED PLOT," a Washington *Post* headline declared six weeks after the *Mercury News* series ran. Even Oliver Stone said that he found the alleged conspiracy unbelievable. Since Disney had just bought the film rights to the C.I.A.-Contra crack articles, I half-teasingly asked Stone, whose "Nixon" was released by Disney, whether he would like to work on the project. "No, I wouldn't touch that one," he said quickly. "I started a script about that back in the eighties, called 'Contra.' But it's very tough for me to do another contemporary political movie. Whatever I do is held up to ridicule going in." He paused, then added, "That's a form of censorship, isn't it?"

Earlier this month, Stone took a light one-two punch from the Northeastern élite: first, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., attacked him during a discussion at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, in New York; then ABC's World News Tonight broadcast a report disparaging the accuracy of "The People vs. Larry Flynt." "Schlesinger talked about 'the facts,' and kept saying, 'Facts are facts,' " Stone told me. "Peter Jennings leads with a frown and a sneer, and then they get me on the same 'What are the facts?' "

Literalism can be a drag, and one would certainly rather watch Oliver Stone movies than Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., movies. But, unpleasant though it can be for artists to have their work fact-checked in public, the scrutiny of Stone's counter-histories may be a measure of cultural health. Society's intellectual antibodies are responding.

And when those who are criticized by the establishment for factual sloppiness and distortion declare that they, too, are victims of factual sloppiness and distortion, they are in effect recommitting themselves to the ideals of accuracy and a common truth. "There was a tremendous amount of misrepresentation about what the movie 'JFK' said," Stone complained. "It was shocking to me. Ninety per cent of the time, the press quotes me out of context." Last September, during a lecture at Southern Methodist University, a distinguished journalist brought down the house when he deplored the debased standards of the mainstream news media, charging that they were "all becoming tabloids." The speaker was Pierre Salinger. ♦

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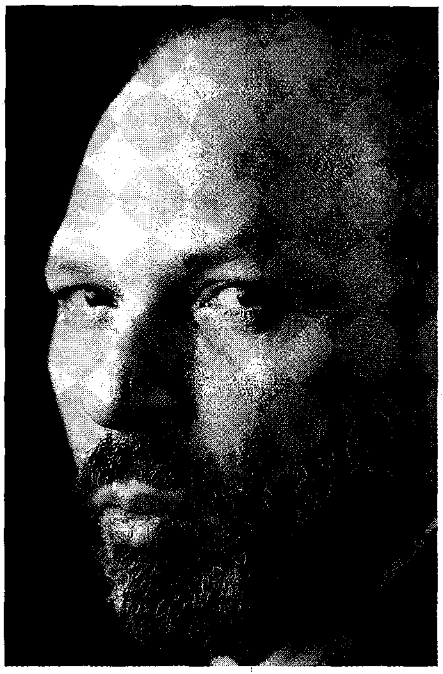
THE CHITLIN CIRCUIT

It may not be what August Wilson has in mind when he proposes his ideal for the black American theatre, but it is what audiences want to see.

BY HENRY LOUIS GATES, JR.

THE setting was the McCarter Theatre, a brick-and-stone edifice on the outskirts of the Princeton University campus. On a hot, sticky evening last June, five hundred members of the Theatre Communications Group—all representatives of serious, which is to say nonprofit, theatre—had gathered for their eleventh biennial national conference. The keynote speech was being delivered by August Wilson, who, at fifty-one, is probably the most celebrated American playwright now writing and is certainly the most accomplished black playwright in this nation's history. Before he said a word, the largely white audience greeted him with a standing ovation.



August Wilson: Does his argument do disservice to his own plays?

SUSAN JOHANN

That was the conference's last moment of unanimity. For here, at this gathering of saints, the dean of American dramatists had come to deliver an unexpected and disturbing polemic. American theatre, Wilson declared, was an instrument of white cultural hegemony, and the recent campaign to integrate and diversify it only made things worse. The spiritual and moral survival of black Americans demanded that they be given a stage of their own. They needed their very own theatres the way they needed sunlight and oxygen. They needed integration the way they needed acid rain.

"There are and have always been two distinct and parallel traditions in black art: that is, art that is conceived and designed to entertain white society, and art that feeds the spirit and celebrates the life of black America," Wilson told his Princeton audience, in a quietly impassioned voice. "The second tradition occurred when the African in the confines of the slave quarters sought to invest his spirit with the strength of his ancestors by conceiving in his art, in his song and dance, a world in which he was the spiritual center." That was the tradition Wilson found to be exemplified by the Black Power movement of the sixties and its cultural arm, the Black Arts scene. Revolutionary Black Arts dramatists such as Ed Bullins and Amiri Baraka were models for authentic black creativity, Wilson maintained, and he placed himself in their direct line of descent.

"His speech was shocking and it was thrilling," recalled Ricardo Khan, the president of the Theatre Communications Group and the artistic director of the country's premier black repertory company, the Crossroads Theatre, in New Brunswick. Wilson is light-skinned, with sparse hair and a close-cropped beard: to some in the audience, he brought to mind Maulana Karenga ("Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution"); to others, Ernst Blofeld ("Hot enough for you, Mr. Bond?"). The black members of the audience started glancing at one another: heads bobbed, a black-power sign was flashed, encouragement was murmured—"Go ahead, brother," "Tell it." Many white audience members, meanwhile, began to shift uneasily, gradually acquiring an expression compounded of pain and puzzlement: *After all we've done for him, this is how he thanks us*? The world of nonprofit theatre is tiny but intense, and, as soon became clear, Wilson's oration was its version of the Simpson verdict.

In the conversational ferment that ensued, almost every conceivable question was given a full airing: Did Wilson's call for an autonomous black theatre amount to separatism? Did race matter to culture, and if so, how much? Was Wilson's salvific notion of the theatre—and his dream of a theatre that would address ordinary black folk—mere romantic delusion? In the course of much high-minded hand-wringing, practically the only possibility not broached was that a black theatre for the masses *already* existed—just not of an order that anybody in the world of serious theatre had in mind.

WHAT attracted the greatest immediate attention was Wilson's unqualified denunciation of color-blind casting. To cast black actors in "white" plays was, he said, "to cast us in the role of mimics." Worse, for a black actor to walk the stage of Western drama was to collaborate with the culture of racism, "to be in league with a thousand naysayers who wish to corrupt the vigor and spirit of his heart." An all-black production of "Death of a Salesman," say, would "deny us our own humanity."

Not surprisingly, Wilson's stand on this issue has found little acceptance among working black actors, dramatists, and directors. Lloyd Richards—Wilson's longtime director and creative partner—has never thought twice about casting James Earl Jones as Timon of Athens or as Judge Brack in "Hedda Gabler." Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian playwright and Nobel Laureate, staunchly declares, "I can assure you that if 'Death of a Salesman' were performed in Nigeria by an all-Eskimo cast it would have resonances totally outside the mediation of color." What's more surprising is

Gwen Pearson in "My Grandmother Prayed for Me," at Atlanta's Fox Theatre. "A lot of what they call highbrow, progressive, avant-garde theatre is boring the shit out of people," the playwright OyamO, a participant in the Black Arts scene, says. Photograph by Larry Fink.

that many stars of the Black Arts firmament are equally dismissive. "If O.J. can play a black man, I don't see any problem with Olivier playing Othello," Amiri Baraka says, with a mordant laugh. And the legendary black playwright and director Douglas Turner Ward claims that many of Sean O'Casey's plays, with their ethos of alienation, actually work better with black actors.

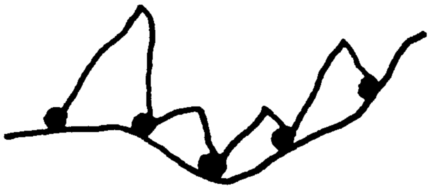
But the dissent on color-blind casting was almost something of a footnote to Wilson's larger brief—that of encouraging the creation of an authentic black theatre. As he saw it, the stakes couldn't be greater. Black theatre could help change the world: it could be "the spearhead of a movement to reignite and reunite our people's positive energy for a political and social change that is reflective of our spiritual truths rather than economic fallacies." The urgency of this creed led to a seemingly self-divided rhetoric. On the one hand, Wilson maintained that "we cannot depend on others," that we must be a "self-determining, self-respecting people." On the other hand, this self-sufficiency was to be subsidized by foundations and government agencies.

If Wilson's rhetoric struck many of his listeners as contradictory—seeming to alternate the balled fist and the outstretched palm—the contradictions only multiplied upon further investigation. August Wilson, born Frederick August Kittel, is in some respects an unlikely spokesman for a new Black Arts movement. He neither looks nor sounds typically black—had he the desire, he could easily pass—and that makes him black first and foremost by self-identification. (His father was a German-American baker in Pittsburgh, where he grew up.) Some see significance in this. The estimable black playwright OyamO, né Charles Gordon, says, "Within our history, many people who are lighter—including the very lightest of us, who can really pass—are sometimes the most angry."

Nor has it escaped comment that Wilson failed to acknowledge his own power and stature within the world of mainstream theatre: his works début at major Broadway theatres, and the white critical establishment has honored them with a cascade of Pulitzer, Drama Desk, and Tony awards. The experimental black playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, whose works include "Venus" and "The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World," says, "August can start by having his own acclaimed plays première in black theatres, instead of where they première now. I'm sorry, but he should examine his own house." One historical luminary of black theatre charges that Wilson himself is the problem of which he purports to hold the solution: "Once the white mainstream theatre found a black artistic spokesman, the one playwright who could do no wrong, the money that used to go to autonomous black theatre started to dry up."

And yet, on closer examination, sharply drawn lines of battle begin to blur. Wilson's oration provoked a swingeing rebuttal in *American Theatre* by Robert Brustein, who is the artistic director of the American Repertory Theatre, the drama critic for *The New Republic*, and a longtime sparring partner of Wilson's. Brustein charged Wilson with promoting subsidized separatism: "What next?" he asked. "Separate schools? Separate washrooms? Separate drinking fountains?" With Anna Deavere Smith—herself a paradigm of casting beyond color—serving as the moderator, the men are to continue their debate this Monday, in New York's Town Hall. The critic Paul Goldberger, writing in the *Times* last week, went so far as to declare that "this is shaping up to be the sharpest cultural debate" since the Mapplethorpe controversy. You'd never guess that Brustein and Wilson are in complete agreement on the one subject that agitates them most: the disastrous nature of the donor-driven trend to diversify regional theatres. Brustein dislikes the trend because he believes that it supplants aesthetic considerations with sociological ones. Wilson dislikes it because, as is true of all movement toward integration, it undermines the integrity and strength of autonomous black institutions.

He has a point. George Wolfe, the producer of the Public Theatre, singles out the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund as having been "incredibly irresponsible" in this regard. He goes on to explain, "It has created a peculiar dynamic where, you know, there was a struggling black theatre that had been nurturing a series of artists and all of a sudden this predominantly white theatre next door is getting a couple of million dollars to invite artists of color into its fold." (To be sure, the officials at the Lila Wallace Fund have also given money to black companies like the Crossroads.) But Wilson wants to take things another step, and create black theatres where they do not currently exist. He believes that any theatre situated in a city with a black population of more than sixty per cent should be converted into a black theatre. White board members and staff would be largely retired in order to insure what he believes to be a cultural and moral imperative: art by, of, and for black people.



Unquestionably, Wilson remains in the grip of a sentimental separatism. (I'll own that it has an emotional grip on me, too, just a rather attenuated one.) He says he has a lot of respect for the "do for self" philosophy of the Nation of Islam; in the early seventies, he was briefly a convert, though mostly in order to keep his Muslim wife company. He's a man who views integration primarily as a destructive force—one that ruined once vital black institutions. He thinks back fondly to an era when we had our own dress shops and businesses, our own Negro Baseball League. This segregated, pre-Brown v. Board of Education era was, he'll tell you, "black America at its strongest and most culturally self-sufficient." From his perspective, separate-but-equal, far from being a perversion of social justice, is an ideal that we should aspire to.

Now, it's one thing to hear this view espoused by Minister Louis Farrakhan and quite another to hear it advanced by August Wilson, a man as lionized as any writer of his generation. It represents a romantic attempt to retrieve an imaginary community in the wake of what seems to be a disintegration of the real one. One of the functions of literature is to bring back the dead, the absent, the train gone by; you might say that cultural nationalism is what happens when the genre of the elegy devolves into ideology, the way furniture might be kilned into charcoal.

Certainly the brutal reductionism of August Wilson's polemics is in stark contrast to his richly textured dramatic oeuvre. Wilson first came to prominence in the mid-eighties, with his fourth play, "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom," which the director Lloyd Richards was able to move from the Yale Repertory Theatre to the Cort Theatre on Broadway. There, his dramatic and verbal imagination galvanized critics, who heralded a major new presence on the American stage. With "Ma Rainey," an ambitious, and still ongoing, cycle of plays came to public notice. Wilson's aim is to explore black American life through plays

ENTERING SCOTT'S NIGHT

(F. Scott Fitzgerald, 1896-1940)

Interweaving
of histories:
A torso enchanted into thread. Time spun inside-
out, and worn so. A sweater only, but, as another time,
Another life shaped it.
Am I my other,
Yet, in double-time stitches? No;
Not quite; not in the looking glass. It will be so

When I step outside, this night: this night when the past
Has not passed. There
here, in the paper-lit garden,
A dark-glowing field of folk, the dead, the celebrants
Making company as Scott would have them,
Who brought their time

Through time. Wearing the inner skin
Of a sweater, ghost garment, I am with them,
Some flying from the thing they feared, and some
Seeking the object of another's fear.
On fountain-shifted ground, among straight bricks
Woven serpentine into walls,
In leaves and loom-light and time,
In the grass-lamp glow

Of hedges, all are still,
And a hooded spark from lanterns
Travels from glass to glass, from eye to eye
Like intuition. It is Scott's,
Moving in two times, among us
As we stand fountain-raining, imperilled
In celebrant stillness, with the shadow of a woman

On serpent-stone totally dancing.

—James Dickey
(1923-1997)

set during each of the decades of the century; most are situated in a black working-class neighborhood of Pittsburgh. "Joe Turner's Come and Gone" (1986), for example, takes place in 1911, and deals with the sense of cultural loss that accompanied the Great Migration; "The Piano Lesson" (which received the Pulitzer in 1987), set during the Depression, uses a dispute over an inherited piano—once the possession of a slave owner—to show that the past is never quite past. In "Fences" (a 1990 Pulitzer), which opens in the year 1957, the grandiloquently embittered Troy Maxson is a former Negro League baseball player who now works as a garbage man; the trajectory of his own life has made a mockery of the supposed glories of integration.

Wilson's 1990 play "Two Trains Running" takes place in a Pittsburgh luncheonette in the late sixties:

> Wolf: I thought [the jukebox] was just fixed. Memphis, I thought you was gonna get you a new jukebox.
>
> Memphis: I told Zanelli to bring me a new one. That what he say he gonna do. He been saying that for the last year.

If you're black, you can't rely on the Zanellis of the world, as the characters in the play learn to their detriment. But a great deal more than race politics is going on here. An unruly luxuriance of language—an ability to ease between trash talk and near-choral transport—is Wilson's great gift; sometimes you wish he were less generous with that gift, for it can come at the expense of conventional dramaturgic virtues like pacing and the sense of closure. Even when he falters, however, Wilson's work is demanding and complex—at the furthest remove from a cultural manifesto.

But if Wilson's avowed cultural politics is difficult to square with his art, it comes with a venerable history of its own. In 1926, W. E. B. Du Bois, writing in his magazine *The Crisis*, took a dim view of "colored" productions of mainstream plays (they "miss the real path," he warned) and called for a new Negro theatre, for which he laid down "four fundamental principles":

> The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: 1. *About us*. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. *By us*. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be a Negro today. 3. *For us*. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. *Near us*. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people.

What would such a theatre look like? Wilson, of course, directs us to what may seem the most plausible candidate: the dramatic art of the Black Power era. That moment and milieu bring to mind a radicalized, leather-clad generation forging its art in the streets, writing plays fuelled by the masses' righteous rage: revolutionary art by the people and for the people. That's certainly how the illuminati liked to represent their project. Baraka's manifesto for "The Revolutionary Theatre" provides a representative précis: "What we show must cause the blood to rush, so that pre-revolutionary temperaments will be bathed in this blood, and it will cause their deepest souls to move, and they will find themselves tensed and clenched, even ready to die. . . . We will scream and cry, murder, run through the streets in agony, if it means some soul will be moved."

Theatre, precisely because of its supposed potential to mobilize the masses, was always at the forefront of the Black Arts movement. Still, it's a funny thing about cultural movements: as a rule, they consist of a handful of people. (The Aesthetic, the Constructivist, the Futurist movements were devoted largely to declaring themselves, self-consciously, to *be* movements.) And by the late sixties, it was clear that the vitality of Black Arts drama had come to center upon two New York-based theatres:

"It looks a lot like him, but he would never have worn a tag on his toe like that."

the Negro Ensemble Company (N.E.C.), based downtown, under the direction of Douglas Turner Ward; and the New Lafayette Theatre, based in Harlem, under the direction of Robert Macbeth. Here was the full flowering of genuine black theatre in this country—the kind that would raise consciousness and temperatures, that promised to make us whole.

"POPULIST modernism," in a phrase coined by the literary scholar Werner Sollors, characterized the regnant ethos of that time and place—its aspiration to an art of high seriousness that would engage the energies of the masses. But between the ideals of modernism and those of populism, one or the other had to give. OyamO—who, like many more senior luminaries of the Black Arts scene (Baraka and Ed Bullins among them), was affiliated with the blacker and artier New Lafayette—recalls that the Harlem theatre's high-flown airs were accompanied by paltry audiences. "There was a condescending attitude toward this community, buttressed by the fact that it was getting five hundred grand from the Ford Foundation every year," he recalls. And the N.E.C. was similarly provided for. This isn't to say that worthy and important work wasn't created in these theatres; it was. But these companies do provide a textbook example of how quickly beneficence becomes entitlement, and patronage a paycheck.

And so the dirty little secret of the Black Arts movement was that it was a project promoted and sustained largely by the Ford Foundation. Liberal-minded Medicis made it; in the fullness of time, they left it to unmake itself. Ed Bullins, one of the principals of the New Lafayette, remembers how that particular temple—a magnificent structure on 137th Street, which the Ford had converted from a movie house with the help of some tony theatrical architects—was destroyed. He describes a meeting between a visiting program officer from the Ford Foundation and the theatre's board. The visitor noticed that there were no women on the board, and he asked about their absence. Bullins both laughs and groans when he recalls, "And then some great mind from Harlem, an actor, spoke up and said, 'Oh, no, we don't need any women on the board, because every thirty days women go through their period and they get evil.' Then and there, I saw one million dollars start sprouting wings and flapping away through the door."

These days, of course, *all* nonprofit theatre is starved for cash. And yet black theatres are already out there, as someone like Larry Leon Hamlin could tell you. Hamlin is the artistic director of the National Black Theatre Festival, and by his count there are perhaps two hundred and fifty regional black theatres in this country, about forty of which are reasonably active. Of course, most of Wilson's own plays gestated at places like the Huntington Theatre Company or the Yale Rep before they were launched on the Great White Way. I asked Wilson about this apparent contradiction. He explained that the Negro Ensemble Company had fallen into decline by the early eighties: "It was not doing work of the quality that we deserve, and there's no theatre that's since stepped into the breach." Wilson can sound as if he were boycotting black theatres for artistic reasons, which is why some people in the black-theatre world can't decide whether he's their savior or their slayer. "I do good work," he says, his point being that his plays deserve the best conditions he can secure for them. And among white theatres, he says, "the rush is now on to do anything that's black. Largely through my plays, what the theatres have found out is that they had this white audience that was starving to get a little understanding of what was happening with the black population, because they very seldom come into contact with them, so they're curious. The white theatres have discovered that there is a market for that."

The fact that part of Wilson's success owes to the appeal of ethnography is precisely what disturbs some black critics: they suspect that Wilson's work is systematically overrated along those lines. "August is genuinely very gifted," Margo Jefferson, one of those critics, says. "Whites who don't know the world whereof he writes get a sense of vast, existential melodramas, sweeping pageants, and it's very exciting, with his insistence always that these people onstage are the real and genuine black people. What happens with whites is that the race element is signalling them every minute, 'You know nothing about this, you're lucky to be here.' "

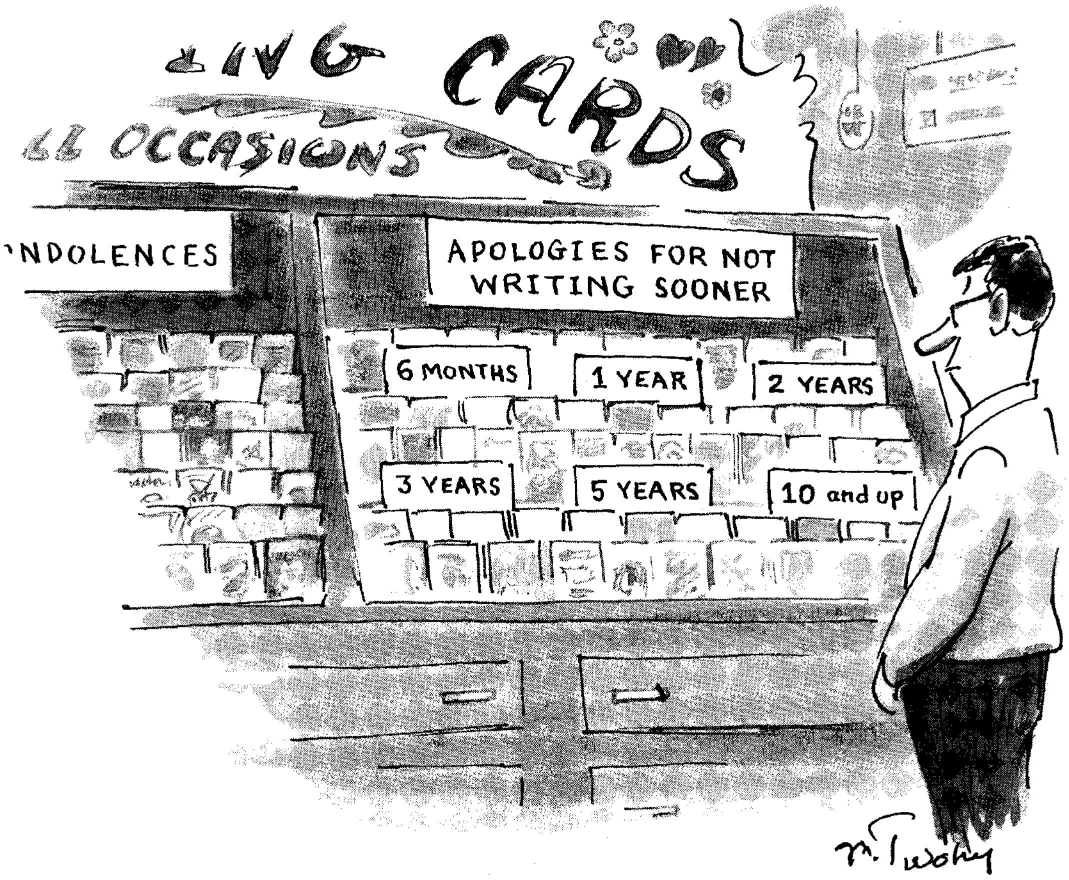
So if you're looking for a theatre of black folk, by black folk, and for black folk—a genuinely sequestered cultural preserve—you'll have to cross the extraordinary dramas of August Wilson off your list. Nor would the Black Arts scene, for all its grand aspirations, qualify: the revolution, it's safe to say, will not be subsidized. You could be forgiven for wondering whether such a black popular theatre really exists. But it does, and, if populist modernism is your creed, it will probably turn your stomach. It's called the Chitlin Circuit, and nobody says you have to like it. But everything in God's creation has a reason, and the Chitlin Circuit is no exception. Perhaps OyamO brings us closest to comprehension when he despairingly observes an uncomfortable truth: "A lot of what they call highbrow, progressive, avant-garde theatre is *boring the shit out of people*." Not to put too fine a point on it.

THE setting now is the Sarah Vaughan Concert Hall—built in 1925 as a Masonic temple—on Broad Street, in downtown Newark. It's a chilly, overcast Sunday afternoon, closing in on three o'clock, which is when the matinée performance of Adrian Williamson's play "My Grandmother Prayed for Me" is supposed to begin. In every sense, we're a long way from the Princeton campus, the site of the despond-drenched T.C.G. conference. On the sidewalk, patrons are eating grilled sausages and hot dogs. Older people make their way inside with the assistance of wheelchairs or walkers; younger ones strut about and survey one another appraisingly. There is much to appraise. These people are styling out, many of them having come from church: you see cloudlike tulle, hatbands of the finest grosgrain ribbon, wool suits and pants in neon shades. Women have taken care to match their shoes and handbags; men sport Stetson and Dobbs hats, Kente-cloth cummerbunds and scarves. There's a blue velvet fedora here, electric-blue trousers there, a Superfly hat and overcoat on a man escorting his magenta-clad wife. Bodies are gleaming, moisturized and fragrant; cheeks are lightly powdered, eyes mascaraed. Broad Street is a poor substitute for a models' runway, but it will have to do until the theatre doors open and swallow up this impromptu village. There are nearly three thousand seats in the hall; within several minutes, most of them are occupied.

The Chitlin Circuit dates back to the nineteen-twenties, when the Theater Owners Booking Association brought plays and other forms of entertainment to black audiences throughout the South and the Midwest. Though it had a reputation for lousy pay and demanding scheduling—its acronym, TOBA, was sometimes said to stand for "Tough on Black Asses"—it was the spawning ground for a good number of accomplished black actors, comics, and musicians. TOBA proper had gone into eclipse by the decade's end, yet the tradition it began—that disparagingly named Chitlin Circuit—never entirely died out. Touring black companies would play anywhere—in a theatre if there was one (sometimes they booked space on weekends or late at night, when the boards would otherwise be vacant) or in a school auditorium if there wasn't. Crisscrossing black America, the circuit established an empire of comedy and pathos, the sublime and the ridiculous: a movable feast that enabled blacks to patronize black entertainers. On the whole, these productions were for the moment, not for the ages. They were the kind of melodrama or farce—or as often both—in which nothing succeeded like excess. But the productions were for, by, and about black folks; and their audience wasn't much inclined to check them against their Stanislavsky anyway.

You don't expect anything very fancy from something called the Chitlin Circuit. Wilson—by way of emphasizing the irreducible differences between blacks and whites—had told the T.C.G. members that "in our culinary history we had to make do with the . . . intestines of the pig rather than the loin and the ham and the bacon." The intestines of the pig are the source of the delicacy known as chitlins; it's a good example of how something that was originally eaten of necessity became, as is the way with acquired tastes, a thing actively enjoyed. The same might be said of the Chitlin Circuit, for the circuit is back in full flush, and has been for several years. Black audiences throughout the country flock to halls like the Beacon Theatre in New York, the Strand Theatre in Boston, and the Fox Theatre in Atlanta. Those audiences are basically blue-collar and pink-collar, and not the type to attend traditional theatre, Larry Leon Hamlin adjudges. But, as the saying has it, they know what they like.

The people behind the shows tend not to vaporize about the "emancipatory potentialities" of their work, or about "forging organic links to the community": they'd be out of business if black folks stopped turning up. Instead, they like to talk numbers. Terryl Calloway, who has worked as a New England promoter for some Chitlin Circuit productions, tells me about plays



that have grossed twenty million dollars or more. "It's no joke," he says gravely.

"Good afternoon! Are you ready to have a good time?" This is the master of ceremonies warming up the Newark crowd. The play that ensues is a now standard combination of elements; that is, it's basically a melodrama, with abundant comic relief and a handful of gospel songs interspersed.

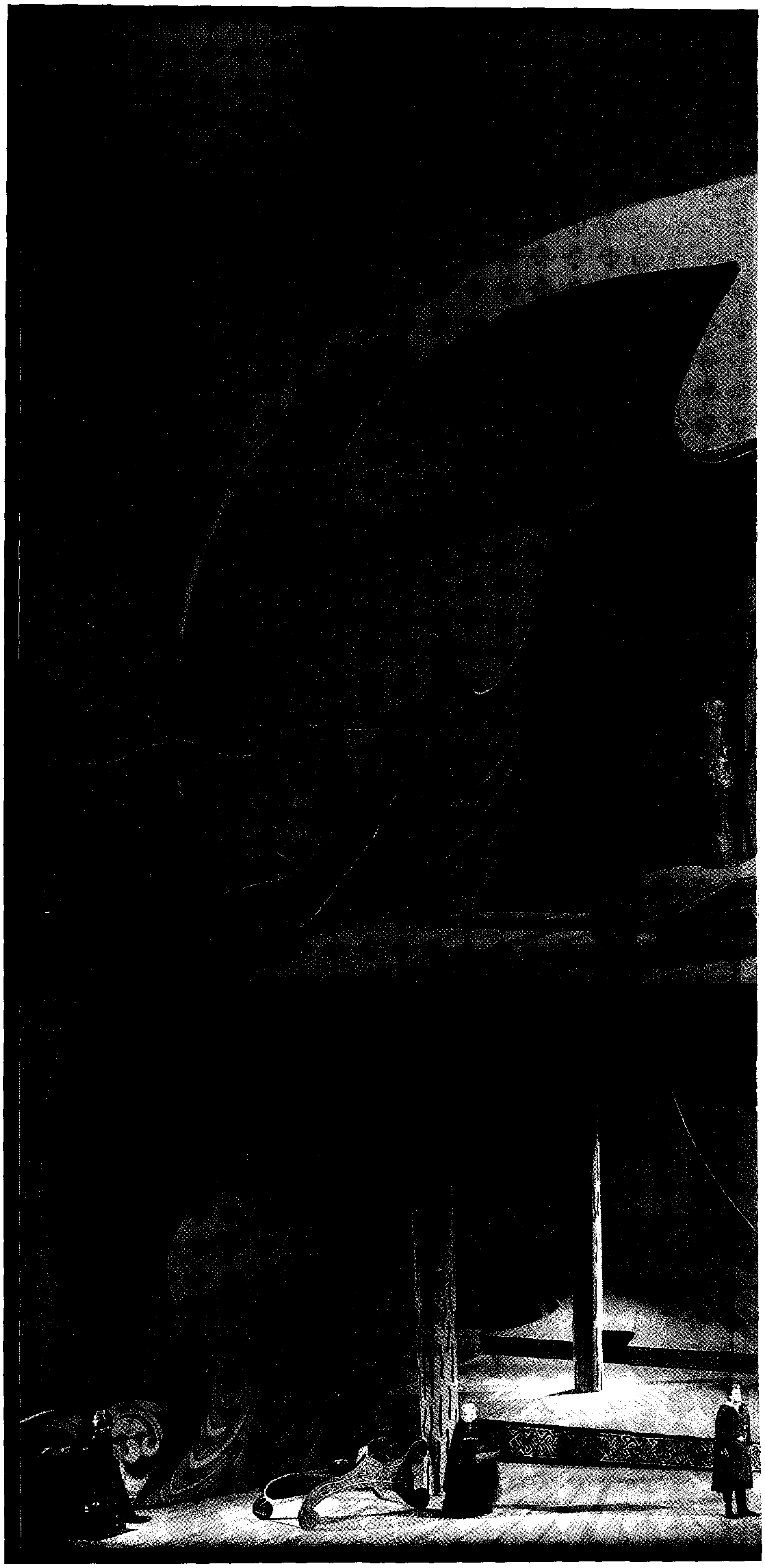
So what have we turned out to see? It seems that Grandmother—stout of body and of spirit—is doing her best to raise her two grandsons, their mother, Samantha, having fallen into crack addiction and prostitution. (When we first see Samantha, she is trying to steal her mother's television in order to pay for her habit.) The elder boy, Rashad, is devout and studious, but the younger one, Ein, has taken up with bad company; in fact, today is the day that he and his best friend, Stickey, are to be inducted into the Big Guns, a local gang headed by Slow Pimp. When Stickey is killed on the street by a member of a rival gang, Ein sets out, gun in hand, to avenge his death. What's a grandmother to do? Well, pray, for one thing.

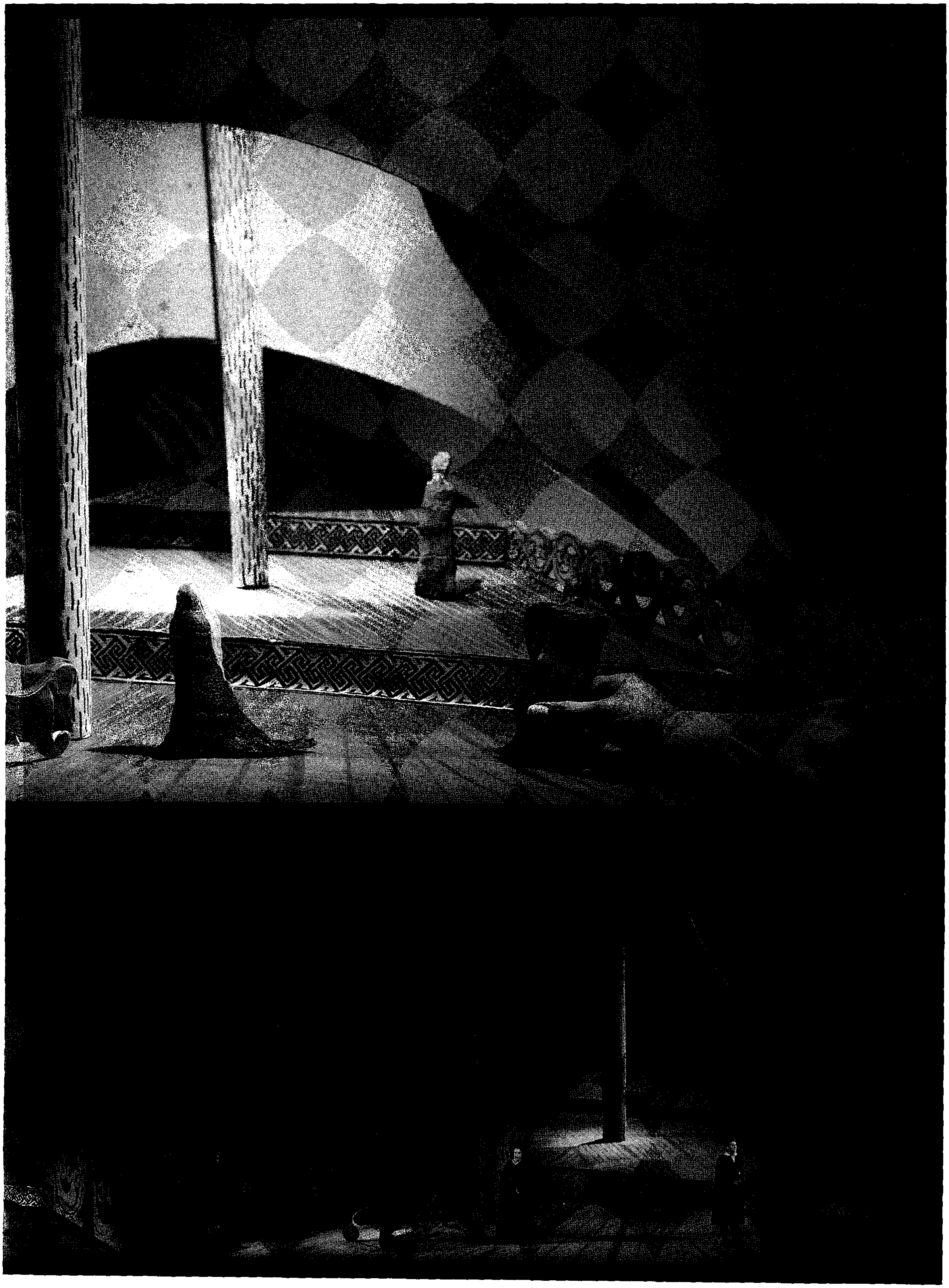
Artistically speaking, "My Grandmother Prayed for Me" makes "Good Times" look like Strindberg. The performances are loud and large; most of the gospel is blared by said grandmother with all the interpretative nuance of a car horn. So broad, so coarse, so over-the-top is this

AUDIO VISUALS

When Richard Wagner sought ideal stagings for his operas in Bayreuth, he turned to painters. For the "Ring" he tried to engage the grandiose Swiss symbolist Arnold Böcklin; for "Parsifal" he enlisted the young Russian Paul von Joukowsky. So there's a certain historical symmetry in David Hockney's concerted attack on "Tristan und Isolde," at the L.A. Opera. Hockney's designs for the grandest of all love stories first appeared in 1987; for a revival that runs from January 29th to February 18th he has not only refined the sets and lighting but also taken over the direction. Here, as in his other opera designs, Hockney favors bold, luminous color schemes and sprawling forms. The veteran heldentenor Siegfried Jerusalem and the young, dark-voiced Austrian soprano Renate Behle head the cast.

Photographs by Gregory Zabilski





production that to render an aesthetic evaluation would seem a sort of category mistake, like asking Julia Child to taste-test chewing tobacco. But it deals with matters that are of immediate concern to the Newark audience, working-class and middle-class alike: gang violence, crack addiction, teen-age pregnancy, deadbeat dads. For this audience, these issues are not *Times* Op-Ed-page fodder; they're the problems of everyday life, as real and close at hand as parking tickets and head colds. It's also true that black America remains disproportionately religious. (Count on a black rap artist—"gangsta" or no—to thank Jesus in his liner notes.) So that's part of it, too.

On my way to the Sarah Vaughan Concert Hall, I bumped into Amiri Baraka, who, when he learned my destination, gave me a gleaming smile and some brotherly advice: "You're about to step into some deep doo-doo." Maybe he's right, and yet I find myself enjoying the spectacle as much as everybody else here. "You lost faith in the church, abandoned your kids, and I even heard you were prostituting," the grandmother tells her daughter. "Let me tell you something. Them drugs ain't nothing but a demon." Samantha's response: "Well, if they a demon, then I'm gon' love hell." People laugh, but they recognize the sound of a lost soul. So the two fabled institutions of the inner city, the pusher and the preacher, must battle for Samantha's soul. There's a similar exchange between the good son and the one going to the bad:

> RASHAD: Those boys you hang with ain't nothing but a bunch of punks. All y'all do is run around these streets beating up on people, robbing people, our black folks at that. . . .
>
> EIN: If we so-called punks, why we got everybody scared of us? I'll tell you why—because we hardcore. We'll smoke anybody that get in our way.
>
> RASHAD: Hardcore? . . . Ain't a thing you out there doing hardcore. Let me tell you what hardcore is: hardcore is going to school, putting your nose in a book getting an education. Hardcore is going to church trying to live your life right for the Lord. Hardcore is going to work every day, busting your behind providing for a family. Look around you. Grandma provided all of this for us, and she pray for us every day. Now *that's* hardcore.

This doubtless isn't what Wilson has in mind when he speaks of the spiritual fortification and survival that black drama can provide. All the same, the audience is audibly stirred by Rashad's peroration, crying out "Hallelujah!" and "Testify!" The subject of racism—or, for that matter, white people—simply never arises: in the all-black world depicted onstage, the risks and remedies are all much closer to hand.

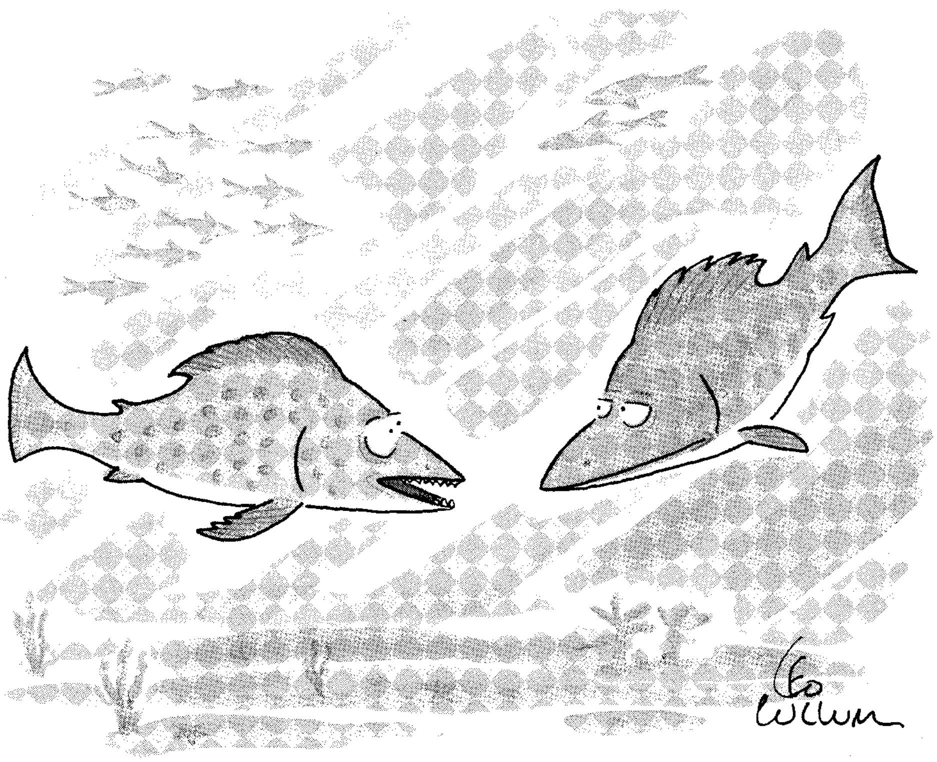
That's one puzzle. Here's another: If theatre is dying, what do we make of these nearly three thousand black folks gathered in downtown Newark? The phenomenon I'm witnessing has nothing in common with "Tony n' Tina's Wedding," say, or dinner theatre in Westchester, offering "Damn Yankees" over a steak and two veg. It's true that black audiences have always had a predilection for talking back at performances. But more than that is going on in this theatre: the intensity of engagement is palpable. During some of the gospel numbers, there are members of the audience who stand up and do the Holy Dance by their seats. However crude the script and the production, they're generating the kind of audience communion that most playwrights can only dream of.

In "My Grandmother Prayed for Me," the deus ex machina is pretty literal. When Ein sets off to seek vengeance, his grandma and brother go in search of him, joined by Samantha, who—having been visited by an angel in the shape of a little boy—has seen the light. ("It was this voice, Mama, this voice from Heaven. It told me that Ein and Rashad need a good mama.") The curtain rises on a gang-infested project. It appears that Ein, too, has seen the light and laid down his gun. "I know I haven't had the best things in life," he tells Slow Pimp defiantly, "but God gave me the best grandmother in the world." Slow Pimp doesn't take his defection well, but it's Rashad who catches the first bullet. Next, Slow Pimp turns his gat on the meddling grandmother. She prays for divine intervention and gets it: the gun jams; Slow Pimp is struck by lightning; the angel raises Rashad from the ground. The audience goes wild.

Nobody said it was high culture, but historically this is what a lot of American theatre, particularly before the First World War, was like. Other "ghettoized" theatres, for all their vibrancy, also ignored many of the criteria for serious art—not least the Yiddish theatre, a center of immigrant Jewish life in New York at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. The former *Times* theatre critic Frank Rich says, "What we think of as the Yiddish theatre today was essentially popular entertainment for immigrants. There were what we'd now think of as hilarious versions of, say, 'King Lear,' in which King Lear lives. Or there were fairy tales, about an impoverished family arriving on the Lower East Side and ending up on Riverside Drive living high on the hog." (There was also, as he notes, an avant-garde Yiddish theatre, based largely in the Bronx, but that's a different, and more elevated, story.)

The fact that the audience at the Sarah Vaughan Concert Hall is entirely black creates an essential dynamic. I mentioned elements of comic relief: they include a black preacher greedy for Grandma's chicken wings; a randy old man trailing toilet paper from a split seam in the back of his pants; the grandmother herself, whose churchiness is outlandishly caricatured; endless references to Stickey's lapses of personal hygiene. All the very worst stereotypes of the race are on display, larger than life. Here, in this racially sequestered space, a black audience laughs uninhibitedly, whereas the presence of white folks would have engendered a familiar anxiety: *Will they think that's what we're really like?* If this drama were shown on television—on any integrated forum—Jesse Jackson would probably denounce it, the N.A.A.C.P. would demand a boycott, and every soul here would swap his or her finery for sandwich boards in order to picket it. You don't want white people to see this kind of spectacle; you want them to see the noble dramas of August Wilson, where the injuries and injustices perpetrated by the white man are never far from our consciousness. (It should be mentioned that there are far more respectable and well-groomed versions of gospel drama—most notably Vy Higgenson's "Mama I Want to Sing" and its progeny—that have achieved a measure of crossover success, serving mainly as vehicles for some very impressive singing. But they're better regarded as pageants, or revues, than stage plays.) By contrast, these Chitlin Circuit plays carry an invisible racial warning sticker: For domestic consumption only—export strictly prohibited.

FOR the creators of this theatre, there are other gratifications to be had. "I've never made so much money in my life as I made when I did the forty or so cities we did on the Chitlin Circuit," James Chapmyn, one veteran of the circuit, tells me.



"They tell me I have a firm consistency and a mild flavor. How about you?"

And Chapmyn wasn't even one of the top grossers. "The guy that did 'Beauty Shop' probably grossed fifteen to twenty-five million dollars in the Chitlin Circuit," he says. "These plays make enormous money."

Chapmyn is a blunt-featured, odd-shaped man, with a bullet head and a Buddha belly. He's thirty-six, and he grew up in Kansas, the son of a Baptist minister. He tells me that he fell out with his father in his early twenties. "He was adamant in teaching us to stand up for who we are, and who I am happens to be a black gay man. He taught me to tell the truth," Chapmyn says, but adds that his father changed his mind when his son came out. "I just wish you had lied," the minister told his son. A resulting disaffection with the church—and a spell as a homeless person—impelled him to write a play for which he has become widely known: "Our Young Black Men Are Dying and Nobody Seems to Care." His experience with the Chitlin Circuit was decidedly mixed but still memorable.

Chapmyn, like everyone else who has succeeded on the Chitlin Circuit, had to master the dark arts of marketing and promotion; and to do so while bypassing the major media. He genially explains the ground rules: "What has happened in America is that you have a very active African-American theatre audience that doesn't get their information from the arts section in the newspaper; that doesn't read reviews but listens to the radio, gets things stuffed in their bulletins in church, has flyers put on their car when they're nightclubbing. That's how people get to know about black theatre. Buying the arts section ain't going to cut it for us. That audience is not interested in the 'black theatre,' and the black-theatre audience is not interested in reading that information. We use radio quite extensively, because in our community and places we've gone African-Americans listen to radio. In fact, there's kind of an unspoken rule on the Chitlin Circuit: if a city doesn't have a black radio station, then the Chitlin Circuit won't perform there."

But the Chitlin Circuit has a less amiable side; indeed, to judge from some of the tales you hear, many of its most dramatic events occur offstage. The inner-city version of foundation program officers are drug dealers with money to burn, and their influence is unmistakable. "They do everything in cash," Chapmyn says. "At our highest point, I know that after we all got our money, we were still collecting in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars a week. That was cash being given to us, usually in envelopes, by people we didn't know. It was scary." He continues,"When I was in that circuit, I dealt with a lot of people who didn't have anything but beeper numbers, who would call me with hotel numbers, who operated through post-office boxes, who would show up at the time of the show—and most of the time take care of me and my people very well."

Not always, though. "In one city, I think we did three shows, and the receipts after expenses were a hundred and forty thousand dollars," Chapmyn recounts. "My percentage of that was to be sixty-five thousand dollars. I remember the people gave me five thousand and told me that if I wanted the rest I'd have to sue them." He ended up spending the night in jail. "I was so mad I was ready to hurt somebody," he explains. "Somebody is going to tell me that they got my sixty thousand dollars and they ain't going to give it to me? I think I flipped a table over and hit somebody in the face."

Larry Leon Hamlin, too, becomes animated when he talks about the sleazy world of popular theatre. "Contracts have been put out on people," he tells me. "If you are a big-time drug dealer, it's like, 'These plays are making money, and I've got money. I'm going to put out a play.' That drug dealer will write a play who has never written a play before, will direct the play, who has never directed a play before. They get deep with guns." James Chapmyn says he dropped out of the circuit because of the criminal element: "Here I am doing a play about all the things killing African-American men, chief among those things being the violence and the drugs, and I'm doing business with people who are probably using the money they make from drugs to promote my play. I had a fundamental problem with that." Chapmyn, plainly, is a man with a mission of uplift. By contrast, many other stars of the Chitlin Circuit have the more single-minded intent of pleasing an audience: they stoop to conquer.

THAT might be said, certainly, of the most successful impresario of the Chitlin Circuit, a man named Shelly Garrett. Garrett maintains that his play "Beauty Shop" has been seen by more than twenty million people; that it's the most successful black stage play in American history; and that he himself is "America's No. 1 black theatrical producer, director, and playwright." Shelly Garrett has never met August Wilson; August Wilson has never heard of Shelly Garrett. They are as unacquainted with each other as art and commerce are said to be. (Except for "Fences" and "The Piano Lesson," both of which were profitable, all of August Wilson's plays have lost money.)

Garrett is a handsome man in his early fifties, given to bright-colored sports coats and heavy gold jewelry, and there is about him the unquiet air of a gambler. He was born in Dallas, worked there as a disk jockey, and later moved to Los Angeles to begin an acting career; he didn't make his début as a dramatist until 1986, with "Snuff and Miniskirts." It played in the Ebony Showcase Theatre, in Los Angeles, for about six weeks. The following year, he staged "Beauty Shop." After running on and off in Los Angeles, that show went on tour, and, as Garrett likes to say, "the rest is history." Garrett had his audience in the palm of his hand and his formula at his fingertips; all that was left was for him to repeat it with slight variation, in plays like "Beauty Shop Part 2," "Living Room," "Barber Shop," and "Laundromat."

"It reminds you of the old commedia-dell'arte stuff," OyamO says of Garrett's approach to theatre. "But it's black, and it's today, and it's loud." He also makes the obvious remark that "if a white man was producing 'Beauty Shop,' they would be lynching it." Still, what Shelly Garrett does has a far better claim to be "community theatre" than what we normally refer to by that name.

Garrett's dramatis personae are as uniform as restaurant place settings: the parts invariably include a mouthy fat woman, a beautiful vamp, a sharp-tongued and swishy gay man, and a handsome black stud, who will ultimately be coupled with the fat woman. Much of the dialogue consists of insults and trash talk. Other options and accessories may be added, to taste; but typically there's a striptease scene, and lots of Teddy Pendergrass on the mixing board. The gay man and the fat woman swap gibes—"play the dozens"—during lulls in the action.

Although Garrett's plays adhere to pretty much the same situational and narrative template, they are not dashed off. "I take so much time in rehearsals and writing these shows," Garrett tells me. "I might rewrite a show forty times, and I take so much time with them and the rehearsals and the delivery of the lines that I just run actors crazy. I run them nuts. But then, at the end, when they get their standing ovation, they love me." A strained chuckle: "Takes them a long time to love me, but finally they do." Garrett prides himself on his professionalism, which lifts him far above the cheesier theatrical realm where drug-pusher auteurs and shakedown artists might freelance. And there's something disarming about his buoyant, show-me-the-money brand of dramaturgy.

Garrett is not the product of anyone's drama workshop; he comes from a world in which the Method refers to a birth-control technique. He has seen almost no "legitimate" theatre, even in its low-end form: "I'm embarrassed to tell people that I've never even seen 'The Wiz.' On Broadway, I've seen 'Les Miz,' 'Cats,' and— What was that black show that had Gregory Hines in it?" His shows play to ordinary black people—the "people on the avenue," as Wilson wistfully puts it—and if these shows are essentially invisible to the white mainstream, so much the better. "But I have things in my show that black people can relate to," Garrett declares. "If you're sitting in that audience and something is happening on that stage that you can absolutely not relate to, why are you even there?"

In "Beauty Shop," Terry (conservative, pretty) is the proprietor of the hair salon; Sylvia (sexy), Margaret (fat), and Chris (gay) are stylists; and Rachel (tall, well dressed) is a customer.

TERRY: Barbara Dell! Is that man still beating on her?

SYLVIA: *Punching her lights out! It must* have been a humdinger 'cause her glasses were *real* dark!

TERRY: Well, if she's stupid enough to stay there with him, she deserves it!

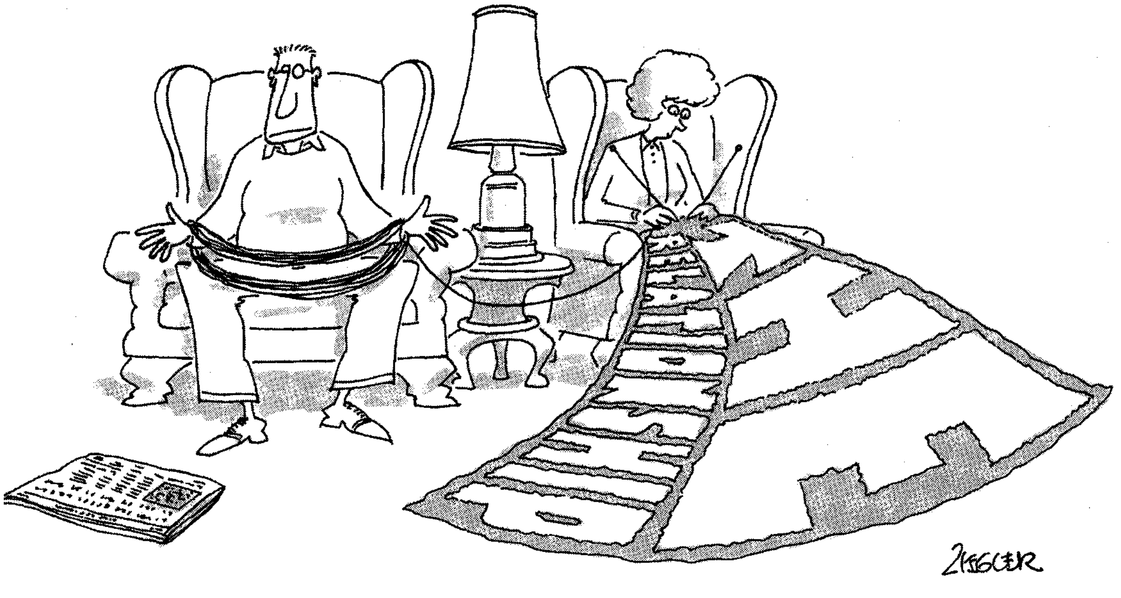
RACHEL: I have never understood why a woman just takes that kind of stuff off of a man.

MARGARET: I can't understand a man raising his hand to *hit* a woman!

CHRIS: I guess you wouldn't. What man would be *brave* enough to hit *you*?

Despite outrageous caricature, it doesn't seem quite right to call these plays homophobic. The gay characters may be stereotyped, but the bigots aren't treated charitably, either; the queen is always given the last word. "You are an embarrassment to the male gender, to the Y.M.C.A., the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, U.S. Army, and . . . Old Spice!" a customer tells Chris in the course of a steadily escalating argument. Chris replies, "Now what you *need* to do is go home and have a little talk with you *mother!* I wasn't *always* gay, I *might* be your *daddy!*" Politically correct it isn't, but neither is it mean-spirited. At the end, the fat woman is rewarded with a desirable man. And occasionally there are even monologues with morals, in which philandering males are put in their place by right-on women.

First and foremost, though, Garrett is a businessman. His production company moves along with him; he refuses to fly, but has a bus that's fully equipped with fax and phone. He's known for his skill in saturating the black press and radio stations.



He's also known for the money he makes selling merchandise like T-shirts and programs. He can tell you that his average ticket price is twenty-seven dollars and fifty cents, that he rarely plays a venue with fewer than two thousand seats, that a show he did in Atlanta netted about six hundred thousand dollars a week. (For purposes of comparison, the weekly net of hit "straight" plays—like "Master Class," "Taking Sides," and so forth—is typically between one and two hundred thousand dollars; the weekly net of hit musicals like "Miss Saigon," "Les Misérables," and "Sunset Boulevard" is usually in the neighborhood of five hundred thousand.) In New York, Garrett's "Beauty Shop" had weekly revenues of more than eight hundred thousand, and that was for an eleven-week run, during which the show sold out every week but one. Garrett remembers the time fondly: "They put me up at the Plaza in New York. First black to ever stay at the penthouse of the Plaza. And I was there for three weeks—the penthouse of the Plaza!"

To most people who both take the theatrical arts seriously and aspire to an "organic connection" with the black community, Garrett is a cultural candy man, and his plays the equivalent of caries. Woodie King, Jr., of New York's New Federal Theatre (which has had unusual success in attracting black audiences for black theatre), expresses a widespread sentiment in the world of political theatre when he describes Garrett as "an individual going after our personal riches." He says, "It's not doing anything for any kind of black community. It's not like he's going to make money, then find five deserving women writers and put on their work. It's always going to be about him." It's clear that for dramatists who view themselves as producing work for their community, but depend for their existence on foundation and government support, Garrett is an embarrassment in more ways than one.

"Artistically, I think they're horrible," the Crossroads' Ricardo Khan says of the Chitlin Circuit's carnivalesque productions. "I don't think the acting is good, I don't think the direction is good, I don't think the level of production is good. But I don't put them down for being able to speak to something that people are feeling. I think the reason it's working is that it's making people laugh at themselves, making them feel good, and they're tired of heavy stuff." But his political consciousness rebels at the easy anodyne, the theatregoer's opiate. His own work, he says, aspires to raise consciousness and transform society. He sounds almost discouraged when he adds, "But people don't always want that. Sometimes they just want to have fun."

NOBODY wants to see the Chitlin Circuit and the Crossroads converge. But there's something heartening about the spectacle of black drama that pays its own way—even if aficionados of serious theatre find something disheartening about the nature of that drama. So maybe we shouldn't worry so much about those Du Boisian yardsticks of blackness. That way lies heartbreak, or confusion. Wilson and his supporters, to listen to them, would divvy up American culture along the color line, sorting out possessions like an amicably divorcing couple. But, as I insist, Wilson's polemics disserve his poetics.

Indeed, his work is a tribute to a hybrid vigor, as an amalgam of black vernacular, American naturalism, and high modernist influences. (In the history of black drama, perhaps only Baraka's 1964 play "Dutchman" represents as formidable an achievement, and that was explicitly a drama of interracial conflict. By contrast, one of Wilson's accomplishments is to register the ambiguous presence of white folks in a segregated black world—the way you see them nowhere and feel them everywhere.) There's no contradiction in the fact that Wilson revels in the black cadences of the barbershop and the barbecue, on the one hand, and pledges fealty to Aristotle's Poetics, on the other. Wilson may talk about cultural autarky, but, to his credit, he doesn't practice it. Inevitably, the audience for serious plays in this mostly white country is mostly white. Wilson writes serious plays. His audience is mostly white. What's to apologize for?

By all means, let there be "political" art and formalist art, populism and modernism, Baraka and Beckett, but let them jostle and collide in the cultural agora. There will be theatres that are black, and also Latino and Asian, and what you will; but, all told, it's better that they not arise from the edicts of cultural commissioners. Despite all the rhetoric about inclusion, I was struck by the fact that many black playwrights told me they felt that their kind of work—usually more "experimental" than realist—was distinctly unwelcome in most black regional theatres. Suzan-Lori Parks reminds me that she didn't grow up in the 'hood: "I'm not black according to a nationalist definition of black womanhood. . . . We discriminate in our own family." As a working dramatist and director, George Wolfe—who, in the spirit of pluralism, says he welcomes all kinds of theatres, ethnically specific and otherwise—admits unease about the neatly color-coded cultural landscape that Wilson conjures up. "I don't live in the world of absolutes," Wolfe says. "I don't think it's a matter of a black theatre versus an American theatre, a black theatre versus a white theatre. I think we need an American theatre that is of, for, and by us—*all* of us."

You may wonder, then, what happens to that self-divided creed of populist modernism: the dream of an art that combines aesthetic vanguardism with popular engagement—which is to say the elevated black theatre for which Wilson seeks patronage. "People are not busting their ass to go and see this stuff," OyamO says bluntly, "and I keep thinking, if this stuff is so significant, why can't it touch ordinary people?" There's reason to believe that such impatience is beginning to spread. Indeed, maybe the most transgressive move for such black theatre would be to explore that sordid, sullying world of the truly demotic. Ed Bullins, the doyen of black revolutionary theatre, regales me with stories he's heard about Chitlin Circuit entrepreneurs "rolling away at night with suitcases of money"—about the shadowy realm of cash-only transactions. But the challenge appeals to him, all the same.

So brace yourself: the Ed Bullins to whom Wilson paid tribute—as one whose dramatic art was hallowed with the blood of proud black warriors—now tells me he's been thinking about entering the Chitlin Circuit himself. Call it populist postmodernism. Somehow, he relishes the idea of a theatre that would be self-supporting, one that didn't just glorify the masses but actually appealed to them. Naturally, though, he'd try to do it a little better. "The idea is to upgrade the production a bit, but go after the same market," he says eagerly. Now, that's a radical thought. ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE LAST TORY

The British economy is booming, London is once again trendy, and everyone thinks that Prime Minister John Major is a very nice man. So why does he seem likely to lose the next election?

BY HUGO YOUNG

In politics, one rule has the force of history behind it: if at the time of an election most people feel richer than they felt at the last one, they will vote for the person they believe to have been responsible for their prosperity. This rule, which imposed itself so emphatically in the United States last November, is taken to have universal application. For a decade, mounting middle-class affluence kept a Conservative, Margaret Thatcher, in power in Britain as surely as it did a Socialist, the late François Mitterrand, in France.

Across the whole of Europe, Britain now stands out as the financial leader. Among the Continent's major economies, Britain's is the fastest-growing, having outpaced France's and Germany's for four years, and it is also the most attractive to investors. Personal disposable income has continued to rise, and, after years of fearful caution, consumer confidence has begun to follow it. Unemployment in Britain continues to fall, even as it climbs in Germany, and the Organization for Economic Coöperation and Development, the most authoritative monitoring body for the developed world, predicted in December that Britain's financial eminence would continue through 1998.

For Prime Minister John Major, the presiding genius of economic recovery, this prediction comes at the perfect time: on May 1st, if not before, there will be a national election. His party, the Conservative Party, has been in power for nearly eighteen years; he has led it for more than six; and there is enough evidence of prosperity to suggest that the historic axiom should still hold. Major invokes it every day, reminding the country, with only modest hyperbole, that it now has a better prospect of inflation-free, export-led growth than it has had at any time since the First World War.

Something, however, has gone wrong. The country appears not to be listening. While reeling off the rosy economic statistics, the Prime Minister has yet to find a way of dealing with a more dismal figure—the finding of innumerable opinion polls that he's trailing the Labour Party by almost twenty points. The polls have been like that, or worse, for three years. Somehow, the old determinism is being thwarted. Instead of another laboratory test proving the ascendancy of the wallet over everything, a different experiment is being conducted—one in which the nation looks deeper into both itself and its leader, and finds problems that he and his party seem incapable of resolving. In particular, a Great Question presents itself: Where does Britain belong? In Europe? Out of Europe? In Mid-Atlantic? On its own?

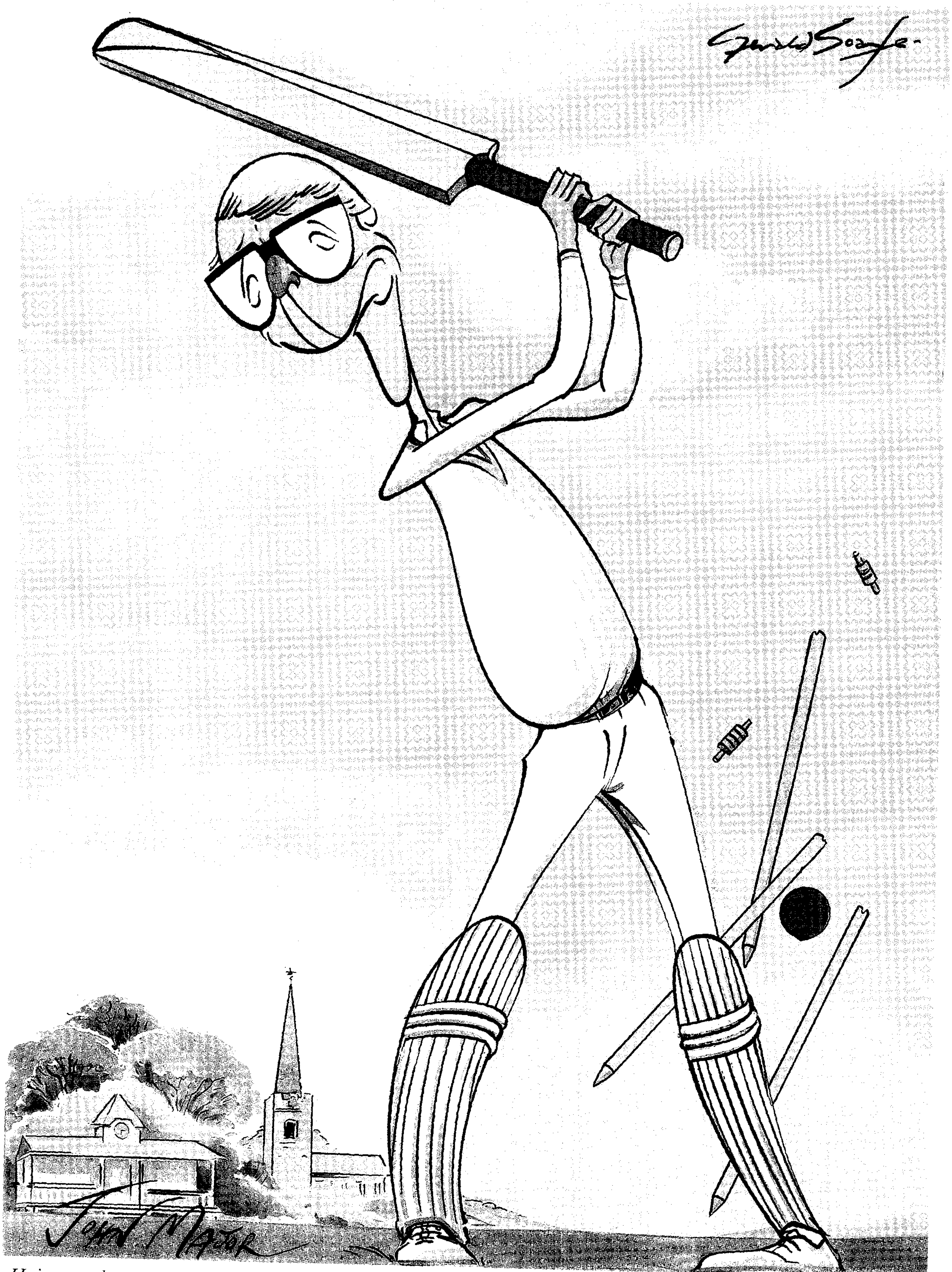
This historic choice is on the verge of defeating a man whose most reassuring credential when he succeeded Margaret Thatcher, in 1990, was that he had no historic vision of the kind with which she had alarmed the nation and impressed the world. He was uncannily prefigured by the character whom Joseph Heller described in "Catch-22," the infamous Major Major: "Even among men lacking all distinction he inevitably stood out as a man lacking more distinction than all the rest, and people who met him were always impressed by how unimpressive he was." That it should fall to this man both to put the Tory Party in its soundest economic position for decades and to render it, on the larger question, unelectable is a bizarre apotheosis. But then bizarrerie has long attended him.

He was born in Worcester Park, a forgettable patch of suburbia on the southern edge of London, in 1943. His childhood is a morass of rememberings and forgettings. He doesn't like to talk about it, perhaps because it was so odd. "Every time I've done so," he told me recently, "it has been distorted. Not necessarily by the person to whom I was talking and who wrote about it, but by the secondary comment that latches upon what was said when I had been talking to someone: 'There he is again, talking about his background and trying to make political capital out of it.' It's a crude point. And that's happened repeatedly. My background is unusual, and I concede that. It is unusual even if I wasn't a Tory. I am happy to concede that. But we have rich and diverse backgrounds in the United Kingdom. Why should that be strange?"

Major's father was sixty-three when he was born, and was something of an exotic. In his early life, he had been a clown and a conjurer, a revue artist who took his touring company around the country: a small-business man, therefore, as well as a much travelled raconteur. He was born Tom Ball. That Britain later elected a Prime Minister called Major, bringing Heller's creation improbably to life, is owed to the fact that Tom Ball and his partner needed a stage name. She called herself Drum. Kitty Drum became his wife, and Drum and Major trod the boards as a double act from the early nineteen-hundreds until Kitty died, in 1928, felled backstage by a piece of scenery. Although Tom remarried—and left the theatre—his fourth child was named John Major. He was registered for school as John Major-Ball, a double-barrelled surname on which the boy insisted until he was a teen-ager. The hyphen betokens a certain class distinction, and Major has said that he didn't like it. Not long ago, however, one of his old teachers, Derek Esterson, gave television viewers a different story. "If you didn't use the hyphenated form, he objected very strongly," Esterson said. "It was more or less a standing joke with the class. I would call the register, and if I didn't always use the hyphenated form he would jump up and shout 'Major-Ball, sir!' "

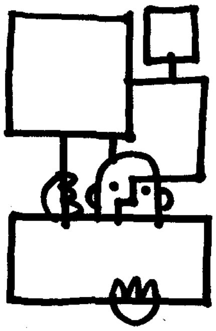
The childhood wasn't easy. By the nineteen-forties, Tom Major-Ball was a

GERALD SCARFE


Gerald Scarfe
John Major

He instructed me on the cricket memorabilia, piece by piece. He likes cricket. Watching it seems to be the only time he enjoys himself.

more orthodox businessman, but not a very successful one, having turned to making garden ornaments while raising a family with his second wife. The austerities of the war and the period after it were not good for the market in garden gnomes: they were, after all, a discretionary purchase, and people stopped buying them. Business fluctuated to such disastrous effect that Tom had to sell his house and move his wife and children from the sedate gentility of Worcester Park to a two-room flat on the border between Brixton and Camberwell—inner and more squalid suburbs—where the kitchen was on the landing, the bathroom was two floors down, and West Indian immigrants were filling up the neighborhood.



During the impressionable years between twelve and fifteen, Jack Major-Ball, as he was known, lived a straitened existence in a rough part of the inner city. His father, older than many boys' grandfathers, was going blind, and, though he continued to turn out the garden gnomes, he was ashamed of the penury into which his family had sunk. He was also heavily in debt. This he attributed partly to inflation, which had a devastating effect on small-business people like him, and partly to petty bureaucrats in the Town Hall, who kept getting in the way of enterprise. The household, evidently, was not immune to political lectures of a Conservative persuasion, along with fecund storytelling by an old showman from another age.

If Major had been an American politician, it is likely that such a background would have been exploited, the familiar tale of struggle that finally ends in triumph. In fact, he has hesitated to make much of it, and instead has shown many signs of wanting to forget it. If Major had been an American, he would also probably have had a decent education. But he had a problem with school. He discharged himself at the age of sixteen, over feeble objections from his parents, and in adult life he has continued to complain unsentimentally about his school experiences. "Anyone who thinks school days are the happiest days of your life should have their bumps felt," he told an early biographer, Penny Junor. "In my experience, school had to be endured before life could be enjoyed." To Anthony Seldon, who has begun work on another biography, he is still making the point: "I didn't like the shepherding together of lesser beings who were being told that they had to be subservient to and respect greater beings who happened to be schoolmasters."

The language of the unreconstructed truant contrasts, however, with a certain embarrassment about the results. When prominence first exposed Major to routine media inspections of his past, his school records turned out to be closed; the local authorities had sealed off the archive. There was difficulty in establishing whether he could even remember which O levels—the first-stage tests then universal in British schools—he had taken. The answer proved to be three while he was at school, followed by three a little later—a miserable performance.

For the 1992 election, his first as Party leader, Major was persuaded to make a campaign film that took him back to his roots, the pollsters and spin doctors having told him that there were votes in it. He put the filming off half a dozen times. When the limousine finally trundled down Coldharbour Lane, Brixton, and stopped outside the old dwelling, Major's reaction seemed perfectly rehearsed. "It's still there," he gasped. "It's still there." But this wasn't rehearsed. The surprise was genuine. He hadn't been back for decades. Life had carried him, mercifully, into another world.

It had done so, moreover, without stopping at the most familiar platform of all—a university. Modern Britain has had many upwardly mobile leaders: Margaret Thatcher's father was a corner grocer, and her predecessor, Edward Heath, was raised by a small-time builder. But Heath and Thatcher followed the familiar path from a state grammar school to Oxford University, the great dissolver of underprivilege for all who are bright enough to seize their opportunity. By the time Margaret Thatcher left Oxford, she had met half of Winston Churchill's Cabinet on their return trips to address meetings of young Tories.

By leaving school at sixteen, Major cut out all chance of university. "Would I change what I did? No," he said when I asked him. "Would I have liked to have been at university with the opportunity of reading the books that people say I haven't read, but in fact I have, and all sorts of other things? Yes, of course I would have liked that. Who wouldn't like the opportunity for a lot of reflection and educational thought?" This void makes him conspicuous among world leaders. Bill Clinton attended Georgetown, Oxford, and Yale Law School; Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, probably Major's most important interlocutor, holds a doctorate from Heidelberg; François Mitterrand was a law graduate of the faculty of political science at the Sorbonne; Boris Yeltsin got a degree in civil engineering after five years at a technical college in the Urals; and even Saddam Hussein apparently studied law. John Major went nowhere at first, except into a series of dead-end jobs of the kind awaiting any school dropout. He worked as a clerk for the London Electricity Board, helped out with the gnomes, was unemployed for many months, was turned down when he applied to be a bus conductor.

LATE last year, the annual Lord Mayor's Banquet was once again held in the ancient Guildhall in the City of London, the financial center. This is put on every year to honor the Prime Minister of the day. The current Lord Mayor is a hard-nosed City accountant, but on this night he was in his role as high-establishment figure, costumed in a robe, silver-buckled shoes, and a tricorn hat, greeting guests after they were floridly announced and then made to walk a gantlet of fifty paces. Ambassadors, jurists, and military top brass all sported an array of regalia, and for the grandest of them a personal chorus of trumpets issued from somewhere in the rafters. The Lord Chief Justice was in his full-bottomed wig, and the Archbishop of Canterbury wore a ceremonial skirt that matched his purple breeches. Last in line was the Prime Minister.

At her zenith, Margaret Thatcher attended the banquet wearing a high Tudor ruff and collar that shamelessly recalled a celebrated portrait of Queen Elizabeth I. Her successor, who appeared in plain white tie and tails, is not so obviously cut out for grandeur. He merited a double fusillade of trumpets, but the applause dribbled out dutifully as he and his wife, Norma, walked up the aisle. Norma, a once-timid housewife who has blossomed as a biographer and small-scale historian, looked apologetic. As it happened, I was watching these proceedings from the gallery above, standing behind a camera. As the mayoral group swivelled to look up for a photograph, I found myself looking directly into Major's face. He was calm, unblinking, easy-smiling behind large spectacles, acquiescent in the preposterous theatricals laid on for his greater glorification. This was politics, British politics. When, at the end of a long evening, he finally prepared to speak, I saw him glancing at the clock: the Lord Mayor's introductory rotundities had gone on too long, and the Prime Minister's own sound bites would be too late to be the top story on the television news. The speech, when it came, was all about the British economic miracle. Major's vowels have never entirely shed the nasal whinge typical of South London. Neither cadence nor climax graced his oratory, and the statistics were hard going at that hour of the night. But he appended allusions to British Nobel Prize winners, Oscars, Broadway triumphs of English shows, and *Newsweek's* recent, and entirely arbitrary, designation of London as the coolest city on the planet, all of it evidence, he lumpenly concluded, that "Britain is back in business—and it's back to stay."

Brixton is only two miles away from the Guildhall. Not long after the banquet, I tried to find out how Major had felt about the piquancy of the shift. His reply was typical of a man who has raised ordinariness into his own bathetic art form: "I have never felt overwhelmed by being here from Brixton, ever, and everyone's background leaves its own imprint and I dare say mine has as well. But I don't see any reason why someone from the backstreets of Brixton hasn't as much right to be in Downing Street as someone who went to Eton, Oxford, the Guards, and the Inns of Court."

FOR John Major, the turning point toward high politics was supplied, with raw directness, by politics itself. At sixteen, after he left school, he joined the Young Conservatives. There he immediately found himself at home. The brooding youth discovered a community he could relate to. Lonely and largely friendless—he was the youngest in the family by eleven years—he began to enjoy a social life. Having been previously confined to one charmless square mile of suburban London, he now travelled to alluring seaside resorts where British parties held their annual conferences. He became, almost at first contact, a politics junkie. Somewhere along the line, Jack Major-Ball disappeared into the troubling past, and John Major emerged as a young man whom local politicians could rely on to work the streets and harry the enemy in a largely working-class part of London that the Labour Party had run since the beginning of time. The activity brought him, quite suddenly, to life. It was the start of an apprenticeship: though he would take up a low-level career in banking, he was, for the next twenty years, preparing for his entry into the holy of holies, Parliament itself.

From the Brixton streets, he graduated to unglamorous work in local politics, eventually helping to manage the public housing in the borough. He wasn't a man of ideas. Political management was his forte, and a kind of gawky, unfailing politeness was his readiest tool for securing results. He came without baggage. When, in 1976, the Party nominated him as its candidate for Huntingdonshire, a "safe" Conservative district near Cambridge, he worked it as if he were likely to lose it, visiting every one of its seventy-seven villages and courting an electorate that, though apparently rural, was actually rather like him: the sparsely populated countryside had been steadily occupied by thousands of Londoners spilling out of the capital in the expansive sixties in search of a better life. In 1979, a national election was called—Thatcher's first, heralding a new ideological age. But for the neat, colorless young man for whom politics was the most serious thing he'd ever been paid to do, ideology was never on his agenda.

Once he was in Parliament, modesty was his style. Liked by most people, he was noticed by few, cultivated by none. It was more than three years before he got his first real job, as a junior whip, and almost another three before he was promoted to a significant policy position, in charge of the smaller outposts of the nation's social-security system. Several contemporaries were promoted much faster and much higher. In the typical curriculum vitae of a British politician, Major's social-security job might have been expected to lead, with great good

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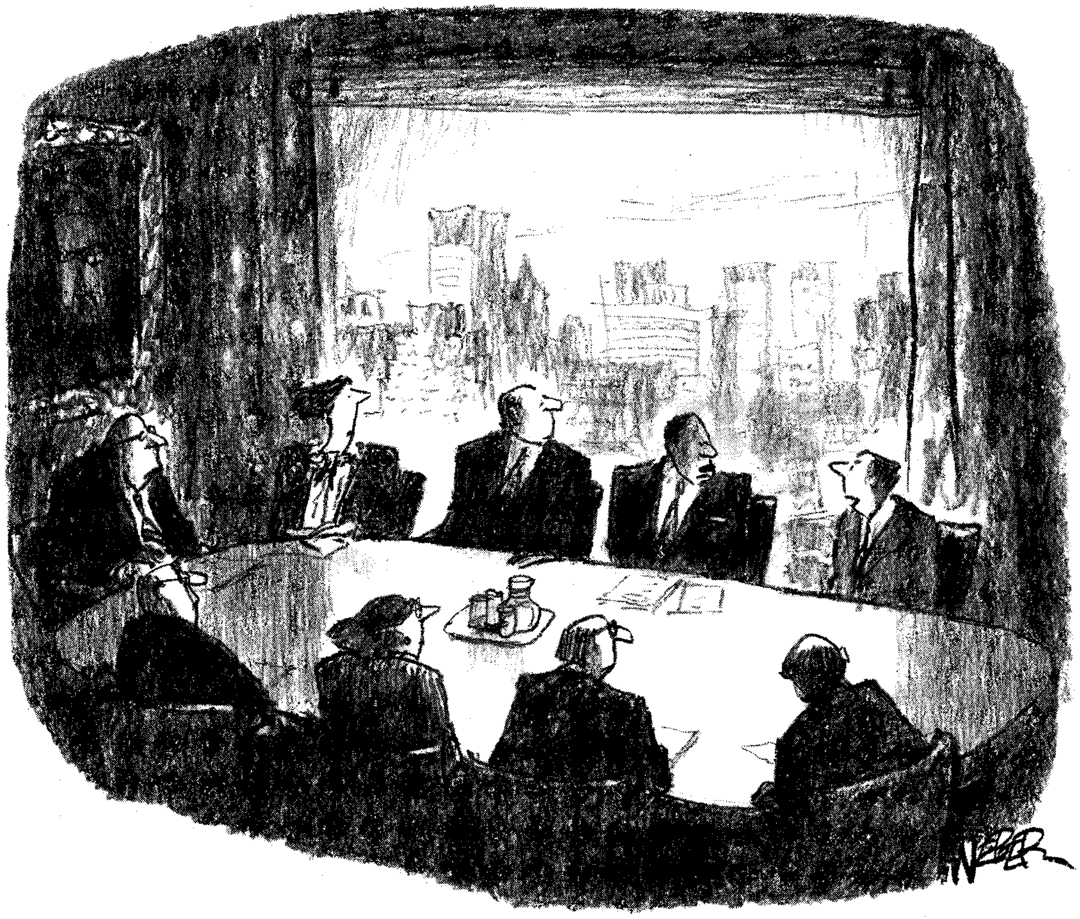


"How come every time I bring up sex somebody changes the subject?"

• •

fortune and after a tortuous and lengthy climb, to a Cabinet position. Instead, in just a little more than five years he found himself Prime Minister.

It turned out that he *had* been personally noticed, by Mrs. Thatcher. She was ever on the lookout for likely young men—seldom women—who seemed plausible supporters of her hard right-wing approach to economic and social questions, and she had selected him for a social-security job similar to the one in which she herself had started ministerial life a quarter century earlier. Perhaps it was an auspice. He had qualified, in her famous phrase, as One of Us, which was to say that he could safely be admitted to her camp of true Conservatives who were certain to be loyal to the leader against the attacks of softer, wetter Tories. "I make up my mind about a man in ten seconds, and I rarely change it" was one of her saws, from which her favorites often took comfort—except that it wasn't true. There had been many favorites. By the mid-eighties, when Thatcher was at the height of her pomp, the Tory abattoir was lined with the corpses of men—Cecil Parkinson, Leon Brittan, and John Moore, to name but three—whom she had once identified as destined to sit one day alongside her, perhaps with a claim on the succession. Major was different.

He survived, however, in ironic circumstances. Although he was instinctively loyal, he was never one of Thatcher's dogmatic disciples. It was enough for her, apparently, that he had no compelling ideas one way or the other. He did agree with her doctrine of monetarism: that the supply of money was the prime cause of inflation, that full employment should be abandoned as a political objective, and that the early-twentieth-century economist John Maynard Keynes was a fossil whose teachings had no place in modern policy. He offered no argument against the painful rigors that Thatcher had inflicted on British society. While other Tories sometimes rebelled, Major went along with the anti-trade-union, market-dominated, welfare-curbing priorities of his patron, never uttering a squeak of protest as she capped the spending of local councils, and destroyed their power, which was essential to the increase of her own. Above all, Major was conveniently competent. Whatever job he had, he didn't drop the ball. He therefore got a big one unnaturally soon: in 1987, he was suddenly raised into the Cabinet, as Chief Secretary to the Treasury, with the task of policing all government expenditures.

Thatcher, by then, had grown ever more imperious, her rages finally provoking a series of equally furious responses among her most senior colleagues. Major entered a Cabinet in which turbulence was seething all around him, and he, with his timely aptitude of character, was its beneficiary. The Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, grappled with the Iron Virago once too often, and was pitched out of his job, as was the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Nigel Lawson—both men great beasts in the political forest. On each occasion, the same amenable replacement was standing quietly by. To call Major a cipher would be unfairly demeaning, but he seemed to be what Thatcher now needed: a competent, deferential, unchallenging, slightly puzzled loyalist—Major, Major, Major Major.

Behind this turbulence, one question loomed: the Great Question.

THE Europe of today is the work of a generation of European leaders, who in the aftermath of the Second World War wanted to insure that there would be no more war on the most warlike continent in the history of the world. To this end, in 1958 they established an economic body, the European Economic Community, known as the Common Market, to lower the customs barriers between European countries, in hope of creating greater political cohesion and, ultimately, an economic entity that would increase Europe's power in the world market—especially in its competition with the United States. Germany and France, nations ruined by war, were behind it, along with four of their neighboring countries—Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands—and in four decades the six have vastly prospered. In 1992, the Common Market became the European Union, and it has been expanded to fifteen countries. For trading purposes, it is in most ways a single unit, with its workers crossing frontiers, with its internal tariffs removed, and with its economic rules increasingly harmonized between its members. The Union's next great ambition is to replace as many as possible of its national currencies by a single common coin, the euro, and establish a single central bank controlling it.

In forty years, this extraordinary project has advanced by fits and starts, but a consistent feature of it has been Britain's uneasy resistance. Britain didn't join at the beginning, tried to get in in the early sixties only to be vetoed by the French leader, Charles de Gaulle, and finally entered in 1973; ever since, it has been the reluctant member of the club. Britain is the offshore island, culturally and mentally aloof from the Continent for centuries, but it is in Britain that the arguments about what "Europe" means for nationhood have been played out with the most divisive agony. In fact, Europe has changed Britain immensely for the better. More than half of British exports now go to the tariff-free Union, and the vast increase in travel has lowered many barricades. The culinary revolution that has given London a respectable claim to being the best place to eat in Europe is only one example of what has been gained from the Continental infection. But infection is how the process continues to be seen by members of the Conservative Party, traditionally the party of the flag. This argument has become the European version of America's own: What power should belong to the states and what to the federal government? On the threshold, probably, of a single currency, even Continental politicians are beginning to wonder just how federal Europe can expect to become.

British politics is now dominated by this question. With the passing of socialism, it has become the only one that matters. In Tory politics, the pallid Mr. Major, prince of operators and scourge of ideologues, has been decisively touched by it. It was instrumental in his becoming Prime Minister, and now is working toward his demise.

THATCHER'S leadership was dominated by anti-Europeanism. As Prime Minister, she inherited the connection to Europe as an axiom of British polity, but from the beginning she attacked it with an aggression that, at first, inspired her party just as much as it revolted the European "partners." Europe, in Thatcher's eyes, was not only federalist but socialist, and was therefore an affront to much she thought she'd done as a great, consensus-defying right-wing leader of Britain. "We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level, with a European superstate exercising a new dominance from Brussels," she lectured the Europeans in 1988, at the height of her power and indignation.

Europe, all the same, defeated her. It was the pretext for one of the most astonishing episodes of British or any other politics. Here was a leader who had won three elections for the Conservative Party, in 1979, 1983, and 1987. By November, 1990, she had helped Ronald Reagan beat down the Soviet empire and had won the Falklands War; she was famous around the world, and most Conservative Members of Parliament owed their jobs to her all-dominating leadership. Yet that month she was ousted by these same M.P.s. She was, after all, only the leader of a party, not a president—a distinction central to British politics. Like all parliamentary leaders, she was the servant of her party before she could be the leader of the nation, and in 1990 her party sacked her.

On one level, the reason was simple: the M.P.s thought she couldn't win them the next election. Though different members of the Party were in revolt for different reasons, most shared a loathing for a style of governing that had finally become intolerable. Some were concerned by the reckless way she had reformed local property taxes, the "poll taxes" that had inflamed typical householders, including many Tories, and had provoked riots in the streets. Some thought her to be genuinely demented: two Cabinet Ministers told me early in 1990 that she was "certifiably barking"—English slang for mad. And for some the defining moment was a summit meeting of European leaders in Rome, at the end of October, 1990: in response to moves toward monetary union she had administered such unbelted savagery upon her European colleagues that it convinced many M.P.s that she was no longer capable of defending the national interest. Since Party rules made it possible to force her to stand for reëlection as its leader, she was duly made to do so and, amid scenes driven by an emotionalism that matched her own, was thrown out.

The Party, looking now for a leader who was Thatcher's polar opposite in style, alighted on the inoffensive gray man from Brixton via Huntingdon, calm, collected, and classless, with opinions that, as far as they could be discerned, attracted the least hostility from the largest number of M.P.s in what was by then a dangerously opinionated party. In particular, he was acceptable to the right, the enraged friends of Thatcher, who were determined to prevent the succession from going to the other challengers, especially Michael Heseltine (in Tory terms a pro-European lefty) or Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary. Both were more fully formed politicians than Major, readier for the purple. Both had done more jobs, been longer at the top, acquired a more formidable aura. But they did not come from the Thatcherite tradition Major did. On this basis, he won quite easily, arriving at the top, as is sometimes the perilous charm of politics, sooner than custom dictated or anyone expected, but the calibre of his right-wingery had never been put precisely to the test. In falling so gratefully on the man whose greatest talent, a friend once said, was to leave "everyone confident and convinced they have John as an ally," the Party didn't really know what it was getting.

He did at first what the faithful wanted. Major's strength, his managerial shrewdness, was what the situation had called for, and he immediately applied it. He lowered the temperature, liquidated the worst problems, made room for British Conservatism to rediscover its distinctive quality as the most formidable election-fighting machine in Europe. Thatcher's taxation disaster, the poll tax, was deftly abandoned, and the street riots ceased. In place of her jagged nationalistic posturing, Major made emollient promises that the country would be "at the very heart of Europe"—an aim that would now sound unimaginably inflammatory but which the Party then permitted him to declare without demur. And in April of 1992 he led it to a narrow but decisive victory, consigning the Labour Party to its fourth successive defeat.

MAJOR now had a five-year term of his own stretching ahead. It was no longer so easy for him to shelter behind a calculated lack of political definition. On many matters, he naturally adopted essential Thatcher positions with more outspoken emphasis than he had expressed in previous jobs. On the economy, for instance, he continued to observe the Thatcher agenda. The railways—a nationalized institution—were set to share the fate of the previously privatized utilities: water, gas, and electricity. Trade-union powers were curtailed yet again. Major, a creature of Thatcher's age, was a Thatcherite, if only because there was nothing else he knew how to be.

But there were soon signs that he wasn't a clone. A part of the Brixton experience that never left him was the resolute hostility it gave him to any kind of racial prejudice. He was and is a humane and decent man; "decent," indeed, is the epithet that has survived through some extravagant descents into ridicule and contempt as his political power has waned. Quite early on, he offered more explicit support for gay rights than any Prime Minister before him, by warmly receiving the actor Ian McKellen in his capacity as a leading gay activist, and endorsing his nomination for a knighthood. Certain elements of the Party were not amused. One of the complaints of the anti-Europe right, which now detests him, is that he remains too vapid in every way. A senior honcho of this school, ranting to me recently, said the trouble with Major is that he "lacks all conviction."

"All?" I asked.

"Oh, well, he cares about the blacks and the Third World, and safe havens for Kurds. But I don't count those."

The right, in short, had rather mistaken their man. With Thatcher gone, he was the one thing keeping the infidel Heseltine at bay, but the other candidate, Douglas Hurd, knew very well that Major would never recite the full Rightist catechism. Hurd told me, "When he was Chief Secretary and I was Home Secretary, we used to have lunch every three or four months. I wasn't close to him, but he talked clearly about his views and they were a long way from hers. I've never understood (a) why she thought he was a protégé, and (b) why the right wing in 1990 thought, Here's our guy. I don't think he deceived anybody. I think they both just wanted to believe in him. I thought I knew differently. I was right, in almost all respects except, perhaps, the purely fiscal area."

A more common error was to underestimate Major's intellectual capacity, the source of much condescension when the chattering classes cottoned on to the meagreness of his education. Somewhere along the line, Major had developed a first-class brain. There seems to be no technicality he can't master. A senior Foreign Office official, a man of top-drawer arrogance, once told me he'd never known a minister to show greater intellectual facility than Major did in coming to grips with the monstrous complexities of the so-called "hard" ECU, the virtual currency that was once making the rounds as the solution to Europe's desire for common money. Raymond Seitz, when he was the United States Ambassador in London during the Bush Administration, saw a lot of Major, and was awed by his intelligence. "Whether it was GATT or arms control or Russia, I was always impressed," Seitz said. "He was always prepared. He was very alert, especially to what had just happened."

Part of this is the result of sheer hard work. His friend Chris Patten, the governor of Hong Kong, says that Major works harder than anyone he knows. The relentless grinder overcompensates for the training he never had. Sarah Hogg, who until 1995 was the head of Major's personal policy staff and remains a woman of some influence at Downing Street, told me, "He has this ability to run down the adrenaline, every single speck of it, and then somehow recharge it overnight. Many nights, I'd go home and think, He's got parliamentary questions tomorrow. He's got a statement tomorrow, yet he's in a state of total exhaustion. Nothing in the tank. But by morning he'd done that extraordinary recharging process."

Major is very good with people who don't patronize him and, perhaps for that reason, has always had women in senior posts around him. He seems more comfortable with them: looks them straight in the eye, offers them the double-fisted handshake of a tactile man who, a glib psychiatrist might conclude, wants to be loved. But he's also a watcher. Douglas Hurd, who continued as Foreign Secretary for the first five years of Major's Premiership, much admired the international negotiating panache of someone whose paucity of foreign experience was evident in his never having visited the United States until he got into the Cabinet. That narrow past, according to Hurd, has been no bar to Major's success in even the widest fields, for he simply transferred to them the lifelong talents of a Brixton survivor—a street wisdom about people.

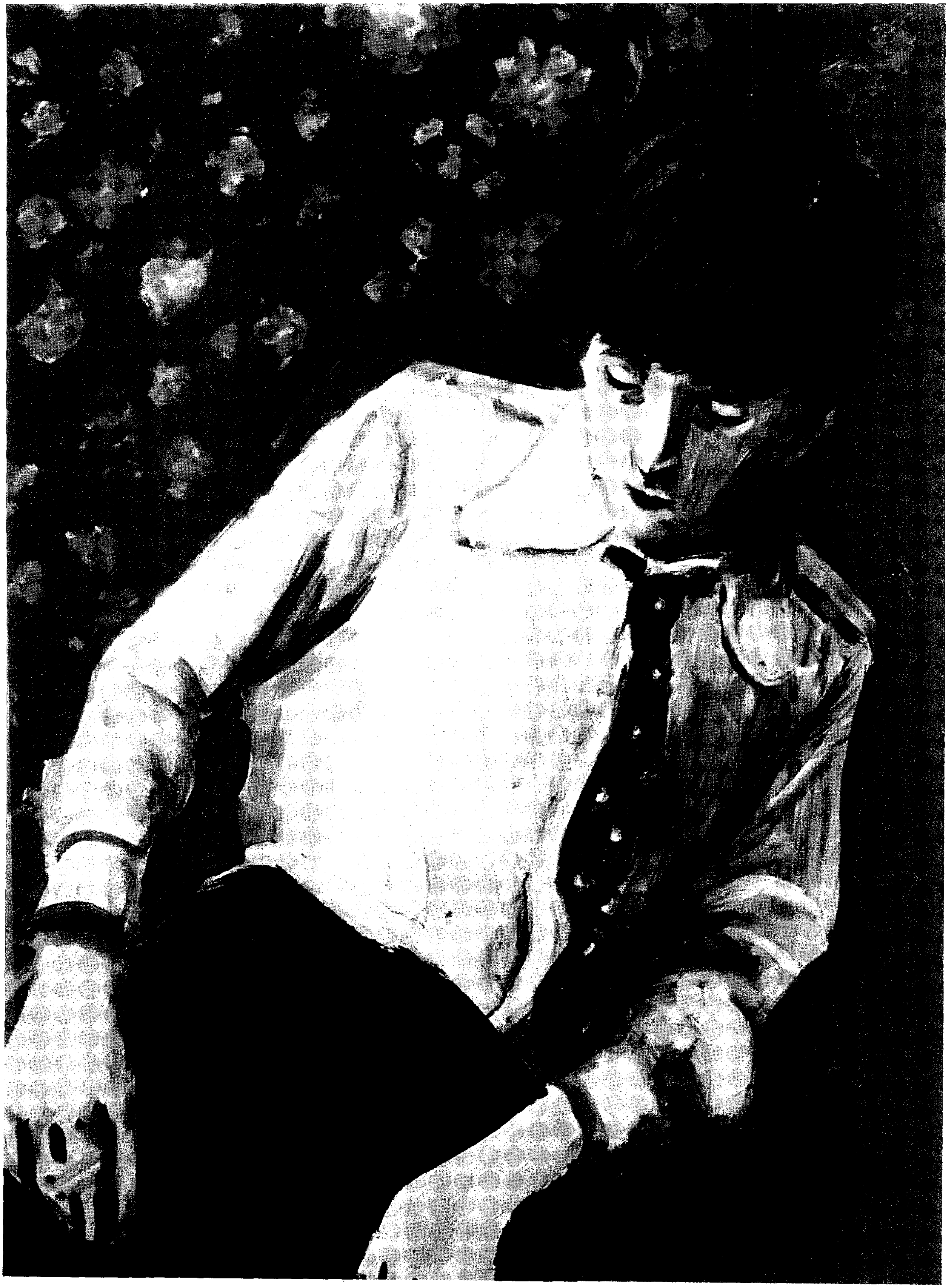
"He is passionately interested in personalities," Hurd said. "He's a student, a collector of people. He watches and studies people. He studies body language more than anyone else I've known. Getting into foreign affairs was like enlarging his collection. He used to say to me, because I was often with him, 'But you didn't watch what his hands were doing. You didn't see what he was doing with his hair at that point.' "

When I reported this to Major, his own body visibly stiffened. Plainly, I had stumbled on the protective device of an

POP ART

Elizabeth Peyton paints men. "I'm not sure why," she says. "Except in a basic way: they're men I'm attracted to." Like her paintings—usually single figures in a field of strong color—her answer is deceptively simple. "Hotel," her recent portrait of John Lennon, at right, captures the singer at a Chicago hotel, in August, 1966, during his personal Golgotha, as the press clamored for an apology for his declaration that the Beatles had become "more popular than Jesus." Peyton excels at such intimate glimpses of pop demigods. Past cycles have included Kurt Cobain, Liam Gallagher, and John Lydon; her show at Gavin Brown's Enterprise gallery, in March, promises more red-lipped male beauties bemused by their sudden transcendence.

GAVIN BROWN'S ENTERPRISE, N.Y.



outsider from way back. "Yes," he said to me, his cover blown. "I look at the body language at least as much as I listen to the words. . . . I have always done it. It's always been there. I have been able to do that, and have done that, as far back as I can ever remember."

He's proud of being a man of the people. "It's deeply ingrained in him that the person who's bringing him dinner is quite as important as the person who's bringing him advice," Sarah Hogg says. "He treats servants in exactly the same way as ambassadors, to the annoyance of some ambassadors." But he feels that others' condescension is always lurking.

For instance, he still can't understand why people should imagine that because he left school early he must be an unlettered philistine. Even so, in his Downing Street flat, where our main conversation took place, there didn't seem to be all that many books. My visit was a rare one. Interviews with journalists are normally held in the Cabinet room at the twenty-six-seater table, which he uses as his office: a daily reassurance, perhaps, that he alone commands the often cantankerous characters who meet there once a week. The flat was more intimate: our knees almost met as we sat across from each other in tightly placed chintz armchairs. The adornments there which he most cares about are cricket memorabilia, and he instructed me on them piece by piece. There were a couple of decent Impressionist paintings on the wall, of which, when I asked him, he showed no knowledge, peering at them as if for the first time. They turned out to be lent, and the lender had stipulated that they shouldn't be publicly identified. Major showed more interest in a horrifically garish portrait of Joan Sutherland, the diva whose biography his wife, Norma, has written. But the books were what was bothering him. "I find it astonishing," he said, "that I read this nonsense from time to time about how I don't read books. . . . I've been a bibliophile, reading everything I can lay my hands on, since I was about four." Over his shoulder, as we spoke, I saw anthologies of cricket writing and an Anthony Trollope collection. He said he always read for half an hour before going to sleep. A Trollope was by his bed; he was "rereading" "In Pale Battalions," by Robert Goddard, a crime writer steeped in English nostalgia; and he had "Sense and Sensibility" on the go again following the success of the film. But the real library, he said, was in his private house, near Huntingdon. He added that he had extended it at both ends, partly to accommodate his groaning shelves.

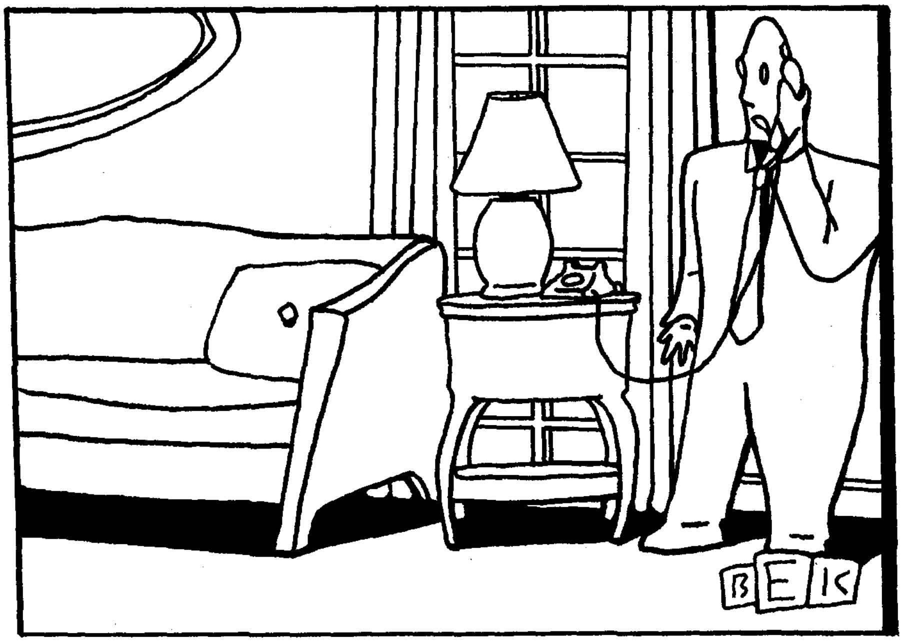
In his determination not to be underestimated, Major calls to mind a contemporary with whom he might seem to have little in common. George Bush, after all, was the American version of an aristocrat. But the Age of Major matches that of Bush. Neither man was many people's obvious first choice for the top job. The mentalities of both were, at best, dilute versions of the heady stuff that had intoxicated the politics of the eighties. Each succeeded a force of nature, and lived not only in the shadow of that force but under the resentful eyes of those who had worshipped the deity who was gone. Coming in as America prepared for war in the Persian Gulf, Major, the new leader of the closest military ally, was a high risk for Bush.

"Who is this guy?" they asked in Washington.

"There was no take on him," Raymond Seitz recalls. "He had been Foreign Secretary for only three months, and he had no record."

Their personal affinities, as much as anything, soon got Major and Bush together. On his first visit to Washington, Major was suitably deferential, and Bush was overjoyed not to be dealing with the woman who, once Reagan had gone, imagined herself the leader of the Free World and allowed it to be known that Bush, confronted by Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, might well lack the spine to take him on. From the moment Major went to Camp David with Bush in December, 1990, and told him "I'm with you" over the Gulf, the relationship of two quiet, modest men, who would both rather like than dislike people, became agreeably productive.

Even then, though, Major could not relinquish his social insecurity, and he never has. He is still very worried about doing the wrong thing. On being invited to Bush's Kennebunkport estate the following summer, he didn't know what clothes to bring. How many short-sleeved shirts? Would there be fishing, which he'd never done? Though unpretentious, he has his vanities. Would his arms look too white under the American sun? "You will notice," one of Major's friends said, "that he never gets out of a helicopter until the blades stop. He has an obsession about his hair being in place." The hovering critics, actual or anticipated, are ever-present in the front of his mind, on large matters as well as on trivia of dress and deportment. For a man at the top of a not insignificant country for six years, he seems to get little fun out of life. "He doesn't allow himself many treats, never goes off to the Ritz for a good meal," a puzzled colleague said. "It's very curious to be Prime Minister for so long and tell everybody the whole time how much you dislike it."



"I don't have time to talk about this now. Can't it wait until we're dead?"

"Do you need an attorney, little boy?"

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Major did not demur when I put that to him. "If you mean I don't take the perks out, I am not interested. I am not in politics for perks," he said. "Politics is a damned serious business," he added before running through his workload, which, he insists, is more massive than for anyone else in his global peer-group.

I got a glimpse of his humorlessness even in Huntingdon, his home and electoral base, where I followed him around one day at the end of November. Out there, people are pleased to see him. On every fourth Friday, he spends, like any ordinary Member of Parliament, a few hours with the people who elected him, advising them on their welfare claims or their housing needs. It's an impressive habit, which most recent Prime Ministers have lost soon after getting into Downing Street. It's the kind of politics that this wholly ungrand leader is most relaxed about.

The next day he attended a breakfast for a hundred and twenty small-business men and women, who paid about thirty dollars for the meal, a small fraction of what it costs to breakfast with Clinton. With no other journalists present, he gave them the message about British success, stressing the steady economic path, disclaiming seductions. "I have a particular loathing of inflation," he said, expressing his deepest economic conviction, which began with his long-gone father and his experiences with unsold garden gnomes. "Inflation is the worm in the apple. I would loathe a short-term boom. I want steady, sustainable growth. I would rather lose the election and be able to say to people we were trying to persuade them about what is right, and didn't manage to do so, than to win it by doing the wrong thing."

The locals were tickled. Later in the day, Major visited a shop that sold tickets for the National Lottery. The lottery, a weekly numbers game, has been one of his Government's great successes, puncturing the age-old priggishness about state-sponsored gambling: in its first two years, it raised more than £2.4 billion ($3.6 billion) for the arts, sports, and charity. This visit marked the second anniversary, and I thought its only purpose was for Major to be photographed purchasing a ticket. He entered the shop, looked around, talked to staff, but failed to buy a ticket. As he was leaving, I asked him why. "Oh, no," he replied knowingly. "Can you imagine what people would say if I won?"

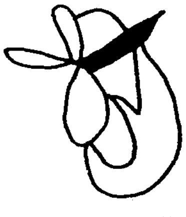
But the odds on winning a million are beyond invisible, I said. Anyway, you could always give it away.

He paused. "I prefer to give my money direct to charity," he solemnly stated—a line that precisely contradicted the very selling point that had converted gambling from an unthinkable vice into a great British life-enhancer. Making further inquiries, I discovered that he had another reason for not playing the game. Major, who carries a big mortgage, has always been worried about money. How terrible it would be, he once mused to a friend, if he won a big prize and was then compelled to spend the rest of his life regretting that he couldn't, in all decency, pocket the proceeds.

So, yes, a miserable sod. And now, having arrived in office as the man with the fewest enemies, he faces the imminent loss of it as a leader with almost no friends. The very question that put him where he is today is on the verge of destroying him.

HE actually began by handling the Europe issue quite well. After Thatcher's rage, Major's mildness and punctilio were greeted with as much relief by Continental leaders as they were by George Bush. He talked their language of consensus, and knew how to negotiate. The expert in body-reading was also formidably well briefed, keeping far more details in his head than grander capos like Kohl and Mitterrand, and he was rewarded accordingly.

The test had come a few months before the election, in December, 1991. In the Dutch town of Maastricht, a treaty was negotiated that significantly advanced the cause of a federal Europe, committing the Union to creating a single currency within the next decade, and making important strides toward closer collaboration on security and foreign policy. The treaty also contemplated several ways in which members would surrender some of their independence to the Union itself, with its federalizing institutions, such as its court and its parliament, becoming more powerful. Though the Maastricht Treaty was a significant step toward more federalism, it was one that Major could accept, because he had secured two crucial exemptions: Britain, alone, retained the right to keep its own illiberal employment laws (under which hours of work, wage levels, and collective rights are less securely guaranteed than on the Continent); and Britain, along with Denmark, kept open the option of not joining the scheme of the single currency. This seemed to preserve what mattered most to the Conservative Party, and when Major returned from Maastricht, his claim that it had been a victory—"Game, set, and match," his spokesman imprudently rejoiced—was accepted by almost all Tories. The Continentals, equally, recognized a cunning negotiator. Ruud Lubbers, the Dutch Prime Minister at the time, told me, "There are two models for negotiation—one rational and one emotional. Most political leaders negotiate emotionally. Margaret Thatcher. Helmut Kohl. You mustn't be intimidated when someone is shouting at you. John Major is a rational negotiator. A gentleman, rational, well briefed, well informed."



At Maastricht, and in its immediate aftermath, Major was in top form, seeming to keep both sides happy. A handful of his diehards objected to what the Europeans were getting up to, and criticized him for declining to use his veto to stop the treaty entirely. But, on the whole, he got away with having it both ways: remaining fully inside the Union, but on Britain's own terms.

Such comfort did not last long. On September 16, 1992, five months after the election, came a humiliation that yoked "Europe" to Major's fate permanently. Until Black Wednesday, as the dreaded day became known, the value of the pound was linked to that of other European currencies through the so-called exchange-rate mechanism. This was designed to be a prelude to full economic union. Central banks agreed to support each other's currencies at preset parities. The pound, however, weakened during the summer of 1992, and speculators began to bet heavily against its being supported. In the days before and after Black Wednesday, the financier George Soros reputedly made over a billion dollars for his fund by selling sterling short, and buying the stronger Deutsche mark, certain that the pound would be devalued, which, with the parities unsustainable, it duly was.

"Coming out of [the mechanism] was a disaster. It was a political disaster. There's no doubt about that, of course it was," Major told me. "It was an embarrassment for the United Kingdom."

But it was more than that. It unleashed the rage of the anti-Europe elements in his party equally upon the European Union and upon him. Their ferocity was extraordinary. From this moment, the British dialogue about Europe descended to a new level of unreason, and the press to new depths of invention. "CAN MAJOR TAKE THE STRAIN?" shouted a headline in the *Times*, Rupert Murdoch's upmarket Europhobic organ, over a text that shamelessly speculated about "the state of the prime minister's mind." Without a shred of evidence, the paper recited the gamut of stress disorders from which he was supposed to be suffering, and several right-wing columnists declared him to be unfit to be a national leader. Having watched six Prime Ministers at close quarters, I can say with confidence that not one of them has been subjected to a more contumacious cacophony of bile from his so-called friends, and that Europe has been at the bottom of it. Major the tactician, forever dodging and weaving between the reality of Britain's deep links with Europe and the fantasy sustained by members of his party of breaking them, has been torn apart. Major the visionary is a creature that never did exist. It was part of his job description, when he succeeded a woman whose visions had turned to nightmares, that it shouldn't exist.

THE next major conference of the European Union is in June, in Amsterdam, after the British election. The next great issue will be which countries will submerge their currencies into the euro. The British position is to wait and see, a stand that keeps the country in the negotiations and appeases the few pro-Europe members who remain in Major's Cabinet. Procrastinate and survive, his familiar tactic, continues. But it's obvious that the Tory Party will not accept a single currency, at least initially, and Major came closer, in talks with me, to revealing his own skepticism than he has done before. His schizoid condition continues. On the one hand, he speaks as though economic and monetary union were virtually impossible: it would involve every member state surrendering control of interest rates and much else to a European central bank, a prospect he finds democratically repugnant. As he said, "I wouldn't like to be the Chancellor of the Exchequer who went to the dispatch box and said, 'Well, I no longer have any control over interest rates, I am sorry they have gone up three per cent, but it's nothing to do with me, Guv.' "

"But that's an argument for never going into economic and monetary union," I replied.

"Yes," he said, "it is an argument for never going in, and it's one we'll have to confront at some stage."

On the other hand, he is utterly opposed to Britain's even contemplating exit from the European Union. "That is madness. It is nonsense, copper-plated nonsense, that we would leave the European Union and form some kind of new Atlantic alliance." In other words, Major wholly favors the European Union but almost wholly disfavors its most definitive project. The cleavage within him is complete.

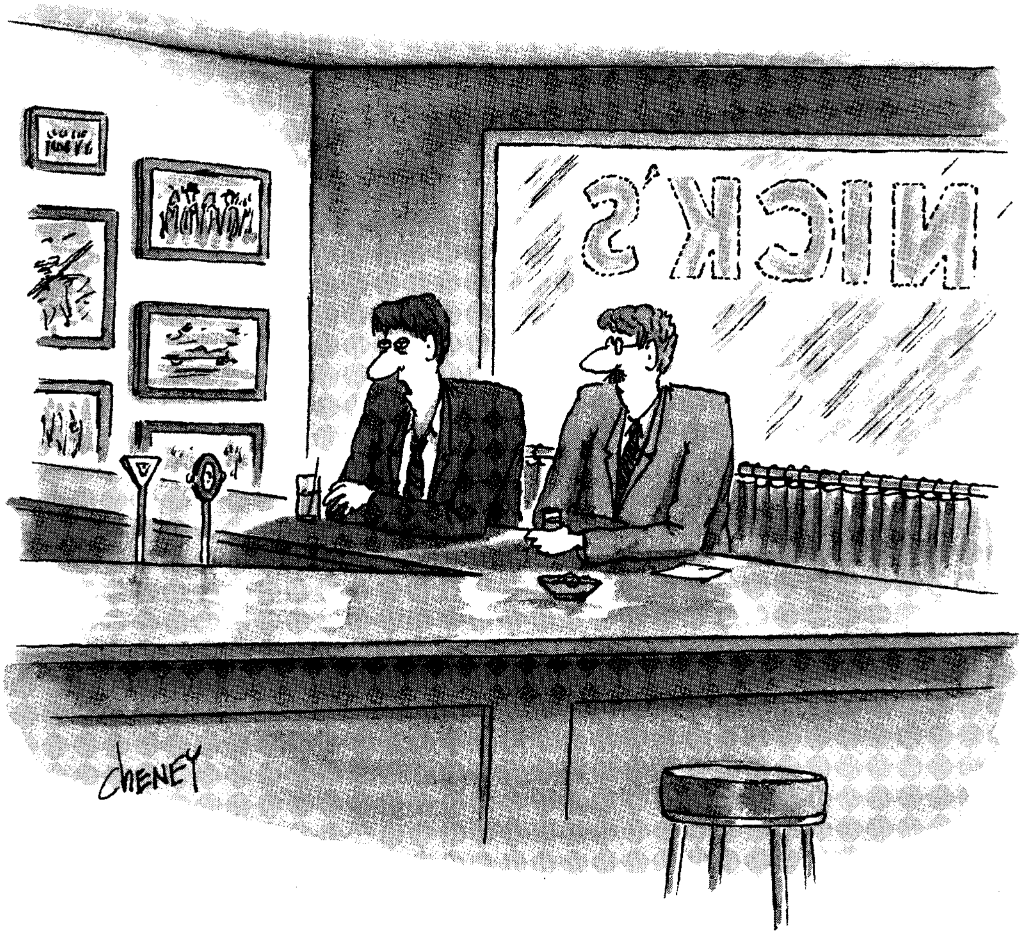
Meanwhile, more and more Tories now talk about quitting Europe entirely. The rejection of Major's line—an unprecedented, organized spurning of the leader—is part of a wider degradation that includes indiscipline, rancor, and sleaze. Conservatism is now openly detested by much of Britain. The country seems to have had enough, notwithstanding the rise of its economy or the respect, tinged with pity, it feels for the weak and decent leader who is about to be engulfed.

The rules governing politicians' ethics in Britain have always been lax, but it is on Major's watch that their inadequacy has been exposed. The Major years, evolving seamlessly out of the Thatcher years, have seen Tory M.P.s accepting bribes for tabling questions in Parliament at the behest of business clients; the National Heritage Secretary was sacked after he was caught, among other things, sucking the toes of an "actress"; another minister resigned when it was discovered that he had fathered an illegitimate child; another was maintained in office even after he had confessed to having had five mistresses. The moral rot of one-party government has seldom become more grimly apparent to a nation that never, in any case, produced a Conservative majority among the voters (although they were obviously happy to tolerate an electoral system which has preserved one in Parliament for four elections). Major, while personally horrified by the sleaze, has always been reluctant to move decisively against it, for fear of offending his allies. As he has over the issue of Europe, he has temporized. Temporizing is always what he sees best how to do.

Approaching an election that could be called anytime between now and May 1st, Major is not without a plan. The Tory political program is now a mix of consolidation and further radicalism, with still more privatizing, perhaps of the welfare state itself, in sight. But Major's principal reëlection strategy rests on deploying simple fear. "Don't Let Labour Ruin It" is the message of speeches and advertising posters. The Conservative Party still has plenty of money behind it, with a "fighting fund" of more than thirty million dollars. Maurice Saatchi, Thatcher's advertising man, is working hard for Major. The man himself yields no ground to the common perception that the Labour Party, under a modernizing leader, Tony Blair, holds few terrors. He regards Blair as a phony capitalist, leading a party that has opportunistically changed its spots, and he can't believe the people could be so gullible as to vote for him. Saatchi's advertising thus far has featured two keynote images: a shifty Blair, menacingly masked in red devil's eyes, and a weeping family group from Middle England, who are meant to convey the coarse message that a Labour government would end in tears. Major still thinks this stuff will work, although few others in his Cabinet share his confidence. He said, "We are now on the verge, after seventeen years, of a degree potentially of stability that we haven't had for a very long time, and at that stage up pops fashionable opinion and says, 'Well, they have got everything right now, so it is safe to turn to the people who oppose them in everything they have done.' " In the cause of dispelling this fashionable fallacy, Major is trying to summon up a slightly new persona—that of a man who, against all odds, has achieved great things.

For the first time, he has begun to make something of that extraordinary past, apparently seeing it as a way of outfacing his challenger; Blair had a very full education, starting at Fettes College, a private school, and passing on to Oxford, which Major still pretends he never missed. The man of toil, not to mention experience, emerges from the Right to smack down the presumptions of the toff from the Left. Behind him are his real achievements. For better or worse, his Government has continued to privatize public businesses and force competition onto public services. He has spent more time on Northern Ireland than all his predecessors in the seventy-six years since Irish Partition, and has done so for no better reason than that he felt it was his duty to try to produce a peace. There were certainly no easy votes in it. And then there is the economy, which he has brought to the unfamiliar pinnacle, and which, in times past, would have guaranteed an election victory.

Early in his time, this cautious fellow, who seldom enters the foothills of oratory and fine phrasemaking, hit upon a defining sentiment to which he was prepared to put his name. On being asked to describe his political purpose as Prime Minister, he replied that he desired to foster "a nation at ease with itself." It was a modest ambition, in keeping with the aura of self-effacing benignity he likes to cultivate. Perhaps it was a personal signal, too. Here, after all, is a man in search of ease with himself, trying to make sense of past and present. His picture of where he might find it reaches back to another England, where, in words he once spoke but surely didn't write himself, are found the "long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and"—paraphrasing George Orwell, a man hitherto never pilfered for Tory propaganda—"old maids bicycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist." The problem, however, is not the ease but the nation. That problem Major has not solved. Does Britain belong in Europe? Six years of Major have produced the answer for which he deserves to be forgotten: Maybe. ♦



"Katherine left me. She decided to make 'The Rules' retroactive."

FICTION

CHINA PATTERN

BY NICHOLSON BAKER

Most summers, Lucy went to Connecticut to visit her great-aunt, Mrs. Charles Parch. Mrs. Parch liked Early English china, and she owned several rare pieces of Bow and Chelsea ware. She had a jar sprigged with prunus blossom, a cream jug illustrating the fable of the ox and the frog (the one in which the frog puffs up so much that he explodes), and a plate with some pink-shadowed caterpillars and butterflies painted on its translucent, faintly greenish surface to disguise small faults in the firing. The pieces weren't as valuable as they might have been, because they had been broken and repaired several times. Over the years, their once invisible cracks had revealed themselves as brown discolorations.

On the dresser in Lucy's guest room was a large Kakiemon-style sauceboat depicting two plump little birds, a lopsided blue tree, and a flaming turtle. The English pattern copiers thought the birds were partridges, but they were really quails. Lucy studied this sauceboat whenever she came. Nowhere on it did it say that it was made at the Bow factory, but Mrs. Parch was sure that it was, because she had become, after years of thought and study, a Bow connoisseur, and could "feel the ox," as she put it, with her fingertips. Bow was, she explained to Lucy, the first manufacturer to employ large amounts of burned and pulverized ox bone in its porcelain recipe.

"It's a little sad, though," Lucy ventured to say during one visit, "killing a whole ox to make a sauceboat. Even so beautiful a sauceboat as the one in my room."

"The ox was already dead," said Mrs. Parch. "They just made thrifty use of its remains. They boiled the bones to get out all the glue and gelatin and nasty business, and then they baked the bones until they turned black, and then they baked them some more, until they turned white. If they stopped baking when the bones were black, they had bone black, which was something they could make into printer's ink. If they kept going until the bones were white, and washed them and sifted them and ground them up very fine, they had something they could mix with powdered stone and clay and water and pour into a mold like thick cream to make china."

"I see," said Lucy. When she woke the next morning, the first thing that caught her eye was a set of new watercolor paints which Mrs. Parch had given her as a tenth-birthday present. She opened the lid. The surface of each blunt square of color appeared porous, like soft-paste porcelain. She looked up from her bed to the sauceboat on the dresser. She found she had a desire to paint it.

Her problem, though, was that it was still very early in the morning, and nobody was up. If she went to the bathroom to fill a cup with water, the pipes would boom disturbingly when she turned on the bathroom tap. The solution was to paint a picture using her own saliva. She painted for forty-five minutes, standing on a chair to get a better look. At one point she thought she was going to run out of saliva altogether, but no, she found after a brief rest that there was more. The discolored crack she painted last, because by then the brush was spontaneously offering an interesting shade of brown.

There were now rustlings coming from the kitchen; Lucy went downstairs and showed her picture to Mrs. Parch.

"What rich colors!" said Mrs. Parch. "You would have made a good china painter. You could have sat next to Thomas Frye and Jefferyes Hamett O'Neale at the old Bow factory, painting birds and blossoms and wheat sheaves all day long. You wouldn't have wanted to be a china dipper, because the china dippers unfortunately died of lead poisoning after a few years. But the china painters had fun."

"Can't I still be a china painter?" Lucy asked.

"Yes, I suppose you could," Mrs. Parch replied.

Lucy majored in anthropology, but she took several ceramics classes, in which she learned the rudiments of slip casting and mold-making. Her most successful early piece was a small fluted bowl cast from a piece of Chelsea ware in Mrs. Parch's collection. She decorated it with two dragonflies and a cereus blossom and shyly showed it to her great-aunt.

Mrs. Parch complimented her on the technique. "Lovely veining in the wings," she said. "But, you know, I can't feel the ox."

Lucy, too, had been having doubts about using commercial porcelain slips. What good was it, she had begun asking herself, to imitate the shapes and patterns of Early English china when the recipe you used was bought ready-mixed from a ceramics-supply house?

As an experiment, she ordered a twenty-pound bag of natural bone ash from a company in Chicago, Midway Gelatin & Supply. The bone ash was the color of Cremora, but grittier. She used a drill with a paint-mixer attachment to blend it—and the talcum-powdery kaolin and feldspar—with water in a large plastic bucket. Two octagonal cream jugs from this batch survived firing. The trumpet vines and hawthorn blossoms that she was able to paint on them were, Mrs. Parch pronounced, superior in taste and execution to anything Lucy had done up till then.

"But I still don't think I feel the ox," said Mrs. Parch.

Lucy had to concede that Mrs. Parch was right. There was something uncraftsmanlike about the attempt to make such delicate objects out of a big brown paper bag of mail-order bone ash. Organic it might be, but who knew whether it was ox bone? What, she wondered, were the names of the oxen?

"There is a young man in Kernfield who keeps an old ox," suggested Mrs. Parch.

The ox-keeper, Gabe, was happy to help; he invited Lucy to see his farm on her way into Hartford to catch the plane. He was a large but not obviously fat man, thought-

FILIP PAGOWSKI

ful of brow, with an honest-sounding, high-pitched laugh. He led her through several warm, dim barns to meet his animal.

"So this is Anatole," said Lucy.

"Anatole!" Gabe called. "He's nearly deaf. *Anatole!*" Gabe banged a piece of wood on a roof support. "Say hello to Lucy!"

Lucy nodded at the ox. To Gabe she said, "You can practically see his entire pelvis."

"Love handles, some call them," said Gabe. "Yes, I bet you could produce quite a few fine teacups from those hips." Then he seemed to regret his flippancy. "I'll miss him when he goes."

Gabe wrote down the names of other ox owners in the area, and furnished Lucy with some useful particulars of the rendering process. Lucy thanked him and they parted with a lingering look.

SOON after, Gabe called with a proposal. "Anatole is not doing so hot," he said, "and my vet is saying that it's time. I was talking about your work with my fiancée, Gina, and she had an interesting idea. She intended for us to register at Tiffany's, but now she's thinking maybe she could commission you to turn Anatole into a set of plates. We could register with you."

Distracted by the idea that Gabe had a fiancée she hadn't known about, Lucy didn't answer immediately.

"You could do a passionflower design as the basic pattern, with all the dragonflies and other bugs crowding around," Gabe suggested.

"Let me give it some thought," Lucy said.

When she called Gabe back the next week, he sounded glum. "Anatole's gone," he said. "I held him when he went, by his ear, the way he liked. He's all yours now, if you want him." Gabe was quiet for a bit, mastering his emotions.

"You and Gina must be very sad about your loss," said Lucy, discovering that she didn't much like saying Gabe's fiancée's name.

"Ah, Gina's gone, too," Gabe said. "Not dead—she met a man at a trade show who makes thickener for milkshakes. That's pretty much over."

"Well!" said Lucy.

"Big changes," Gabe said. "Anyway, I do want you to know I had Peekman Brothers do a special run, only for Anatole, no other carcasses, so now the bones are all cut up and steam-cleaned and ready for you." A tentative note crept into Gabe's voice. "Do you still want them?"

"I think I could find a use for them, sure," said Lucy.

"Maybe you could come down, have dinner, we'll talk about it," said Gabe. "I'd like to know your plans for the . . . material."

LUCY calcined Anatole's bones at three thousand degrees, then ground them fine. She did what was perhaps her best work to date in the series of asparagus-and-"dishevelled peacock" plates that she painted on bisque shapes made from this batch of slip. Was it only the idea that she knew the true source of the bones which made her brush move with more exactitude and joyous purpose, or was it also her wish to show Gabe how well she could transform the ashes of the object of his grief? A picture of one of the plates was published in *The American Ceramist;* the set also received a medal in the Traditional Slipcast category at the prestigious Ward-Radlenauer Pottery Convention, in Albuquerque.

But Mrs. Parch was, as always, the real judge. She held a plate and rubbed it with her thumb, near an asparagus spear, with her eyes closed. Then she spent a long time holding the sauceboat from the guest room, which she had asked Lucy to bring down for the sake of comparison. Then she held Lucy's plate again. Finally she nodded and said, "We must celebrate. I can feel the ox. Congratulations."

Pleased, Lucy poured some cider for the two of them and got out the little lunch she had brought with her. Mrs. Parch was partial to Italian olives; Lucy as usual had bought some for her at the local gourmet-olive shop. Next door to the Olive Room was a toy store, but since there were fewer children in the area now and more college students, the toy store had taken to selling more ostensibly grownup things—candles in the form of severed hands, for instance, and fake gangrenous wounds that squirted disappearing blood on your clothes. The man who owned the Olive Room had become friendly with the couple who managed the toy store, and as a show of solidarity he had dropped a number of glass eyeballs randomly in several of his large glass olive jars. They were working their way down among all the purply blackness, peeping out. The young hireling who had spooned out Lucy's selections, distracted by her charms, failed to notice that he had retrieved one glass eye as well as a quantity of olives in one of his dips into a jar. Nor did Lucy herself notice.

Thus when Mrs. Parch lifted what she expected to be a savory, wrinkled Italian olive to her mouth, she sensed something unexpectedly smooth and spherical in her fingers. She looked down at what she held. A small glass eye was staring directly at her. This object, flung suddenly from her frightened grasp, hit her Bow sauceboat. The old crack lines gave way.

"Oh, no, the sauceboat!" said Lucy.

Mrs. Parch stared fixedly at the fragments of china. "I must have a nap now," she said abruptly.

At five that evening, when Lucy went in to wake her, Mrs. Parch seemed a different person. Her normally coiffed white hair lay disarranged against the pillow.

"I'll take a cast of it and repair it," reassured Lucy.

"It's been repaired too much," replied Mrs. Parch, in a low but compelling voice. "Just grind it up fine and use it again, as they used to do at the old Bow works. Make it a part of your own slip. Keep the tradition alive." She paused for a moment, and then patted Lucy's sleeve. "The eye has seen me, and I've made a new will. Listen to what I have to say."

Lucy bent close.

"*Quail pattern,*" breathed Mrs. Parch.

LUCY called Gabe. "Gabe, Great-Aunt Parch has died. It's devastating."

"Oh, Lucy," said Gabe.

"She gave a great deal of money to the hospital, and they say they're going to be shipping me several of her longer bones in dry ice."

"Whoa!" said Gabe.

"I've been thinking about it," said Lucy. "She wants to be remembered. Anyone who says that's sick is sick."

"Still," said Gabe, doubtfully.

"I have a request. Do you think you can get Peekman Brothers to do a special run?"

"I don't know," said Gabe. "Anatole was an ox, quite frankly. I'll call Tom Peekman and see what his feelings are."

AT the wedding reception, two years later, there was a large punch bowl at the drinks table, done in the Kakiemon style. As drinks were ladled out to the guests, the images on the inside of the bowl came slowly into view: two plump birds, a lopsided tree, and a flaming turtle.

"We would also like to thank my Great-Aunt Parch, who first brought Gabe and me together," said Lucy, during the toasts. "She very much wanted to be here. Let us raise a glass to honor her kindness, her grace, and her extensive knowledge of Early English porcelain. To her memory!" All raised their glasses and drank. A large doughnut-shaped piece of ice floating in the punch bowl made a sudden snapping sound. ◆

A CRITIC AT LARGE

GREAT SOUL

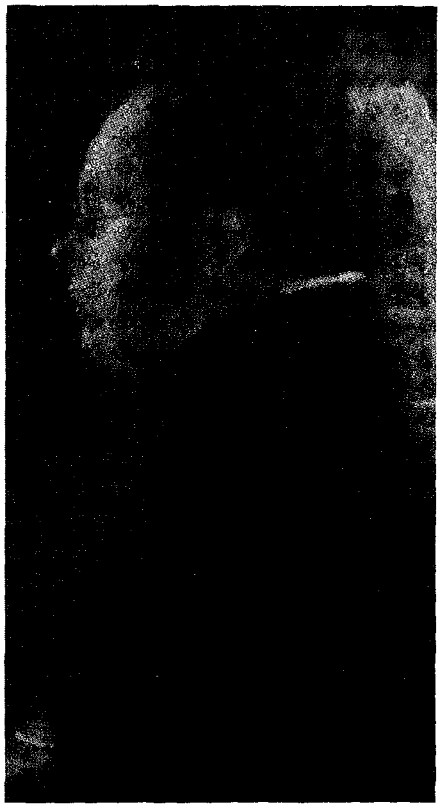
After two centuries, Schubert is as mesmerizing and as mystifying as ever.

BY ALEX ROSS

WHAT was he like? You hear different things. In public, Franz Schubert usually presented himself as an amiable bohemian; he wore a face suitable for the master of the art of song. But from time to time he showed a fiercer side of his character. If one colorful story is to be believed, he got drunk in a coffeehouse one night and began verbally abusing a group of Viennese musicians who had asked him to write something. Suddenly, a formidable artistic imagination was venting its wrath on a mediocre world:

> You think yourselves artists? You're a bunch of blowers and fiddlers! I am an artist! I am Schubert, Franz Schubert, whom the whole world knows and talks about! Who has written great things and beautiful things that you don't begin to understand! . . . Cantatas and quartets, operas and symphonies! Because I am not just a composer of dances, as the stupid newspapers say and idiots repeat—I am Schubert! Franz Schubert! And don't you forget it! And if people talk about "art," they mean *me,* not you worms and insects, who demand solos for yourselves that I will never write. . . . Crawling, nibbling worms who should be crushed under my foot—the foot of a man who is reaching for the stars—*sublimi feriam sidera vertice*—translate that for them!

This tirade was recorded, long after it could have happened, by Eduard von Bauernfeld, a friend given to elaborate anecdotes. It may be partly or entirely fictional: such are the problems for anyone trying to grasp the poorly documented, agonizingly short-lived phenomenon that was Schubert. Yet something here rings true, despite all the melodramatic flourishes and the over-the-top quotation from Horace ("With head held high, I will touch the stars"). It is the tone of confidence, of youthful certainty, that Schubert sustained right up to his death, at thirty-one. You can also hear it in a curious little rhyme by the playwright Franz Grillparzer, seemingly written as a kind of memento of the composer's personality:



I am Schubert, Schubert's my name,
Whatever's said of me is said.
If you approve the path I led,
Very well then, do the same.

And the same peremptory voice crops up in Schubert's infrequent personal writings. "Their world-system is human / Mine I know to be divine," he proclaims in one poem. In another he seeks a "pure, powerful existence." Once, in the middle of the night, he scrawled in his notebook, "Enviable Nero, you who had the courage to destroy a detestable people with strings and song!!"

Impressions of Schubert's character have varied wildly over time. Most of the composer's friends were intent on remembering him as a sort of permanently tipsy idiot savant, who scribbled masterpieces in a somnambulistic trance. This is the image that became standard in the nineteenth century, particularly in Victorian England. Even Robert Schumann, who promoted Schubert's greatness, liked to picture him as a "guileless child romping among giants." The twentieth century, inevitably, has been preoccupied instead with uncovering Schubert's darkness and complexity. Lately, there has been talk of the syphilitic Schubert, the hedonistic Schubert, the dissident Schubert, the homosexual Schubert. You can measure the change in a composer's image by listening to movie soundtracks. Where Richard Tauber once sang ditsy operetta arrangements of Schubert in "Blossom Time," Woody Allen's "Crimes and Misdemeanors" used the vacillating harmonies of the G-Major Quartet to symbolize the moral slide of a doctor who arranges the murder of his mistress, and the film (and the play) "Death and the Maiden" employed the Schubert quartet of that title as accompaniment to torture.

In part, the image of Schubert has proved unstable simply because the historical record is so weak. Here's a biography no one will debate: he was born in 1797, lived in Vienna, wrote a huge amount of music, kept to a small circle of friends, and died in 1828. But did he die of typhoid fever? Tertiary syphilis? Alcoholism? The dearth of information has sucked in every kind of biographical fantasy. There is an even deeper problem: any arrangement of the facts leaves out something essential. Proponents of the cutesy Schubert (there are still some, especially in Austria) have trouble explaining his propensity for songs like "Voluntary Oblivion" and "I Creep Around, Anxious and Silent." Fans of the dark side don't know what to do with documents incontrovertibly demonstrating that he liked to sit in coffeehouses and play skittles. In short, a lot of the ambivalence emanates from Schubert himself. I have been making my way through dozens of books and articles about Schubert, and I still have difficulty in imagining who this man was.

The man is not quite there; the music is another thing altogether. Its presence—its immediacy—is tremendous. It often inspires a kind of mad love in its listeners. I am certainly one of the victims. I remember my first encounters

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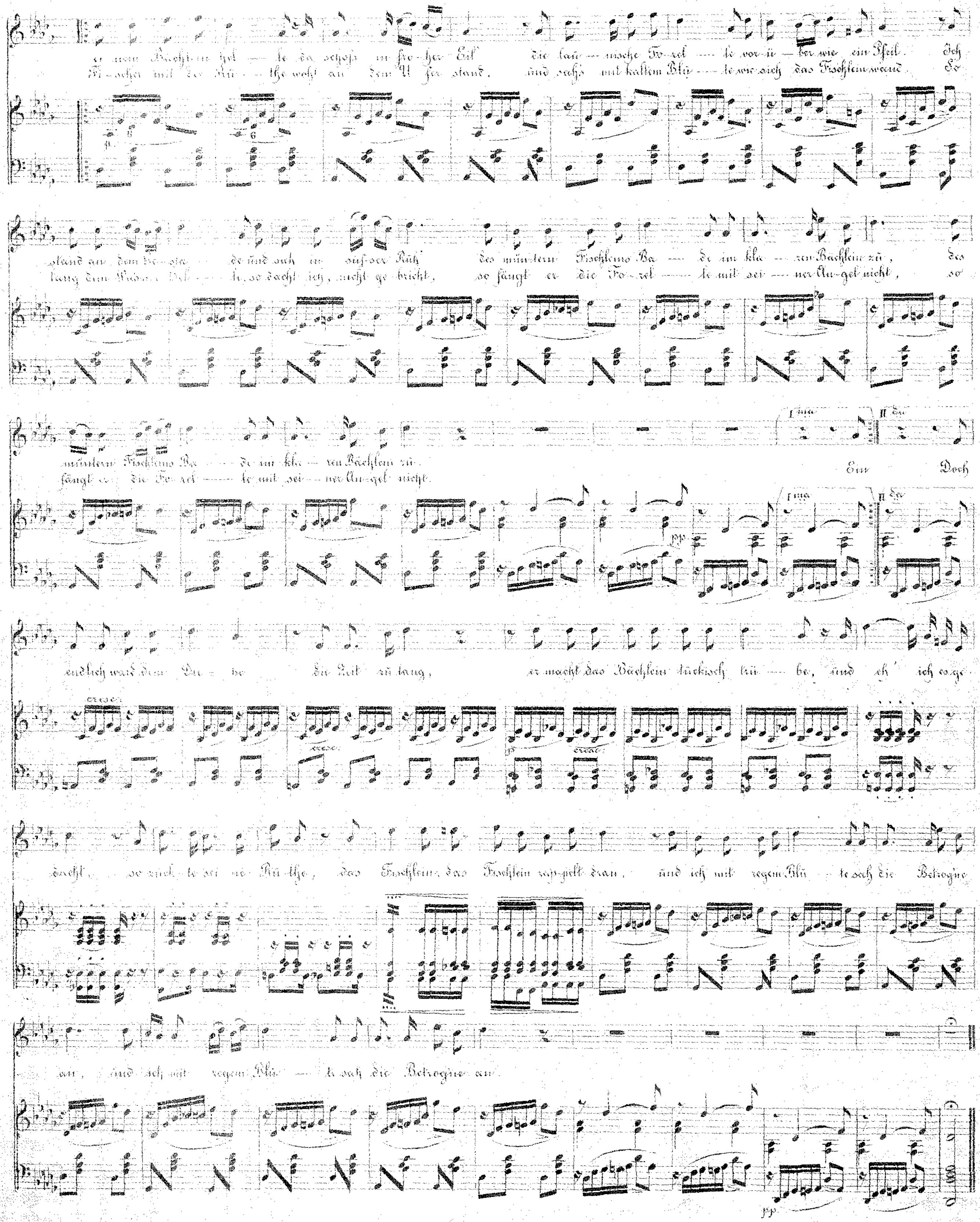
…n einem Bächlein hel - le da schoss in fro - her Eil die lau - nische Fo - rel - le vor - ü - ber wie ein Pfeil. Ich
Fi - scher mit der Ru - the wohl an dem U - fer stand, und sah's mit kaltem Blu - te wie sich das Fischlein wand. So
stand an dem Ge - sta - de und sah in süsser Ruh des muntern Fischleins Ba - de im kla - ren Bächlein zu, des
lang dem Wasser Hel - le, so dacht ich, nicht ge - bricht, so fängt er die Fo - rel - le mit sei - ner An - gel nicht, so
muntern Fischleins Ba - de im kla - ren Bächlein zu.
fängt er die Fo - rel - le mit sei - ner An - gel nicht.
Ein
Doch
endlich ward dem Die - be die Zeit zu lang, er macht das Bächlein tückisch trü - be, und eh' ich es ge - dacht, so zuck - te sei - ne Ru - the, das Fischlein, das Fischlein zap - pelt dran, und ich mit regem Blu - te sah die Betrogne an, und ich mit regem Blu - te sah die Betrogne an.
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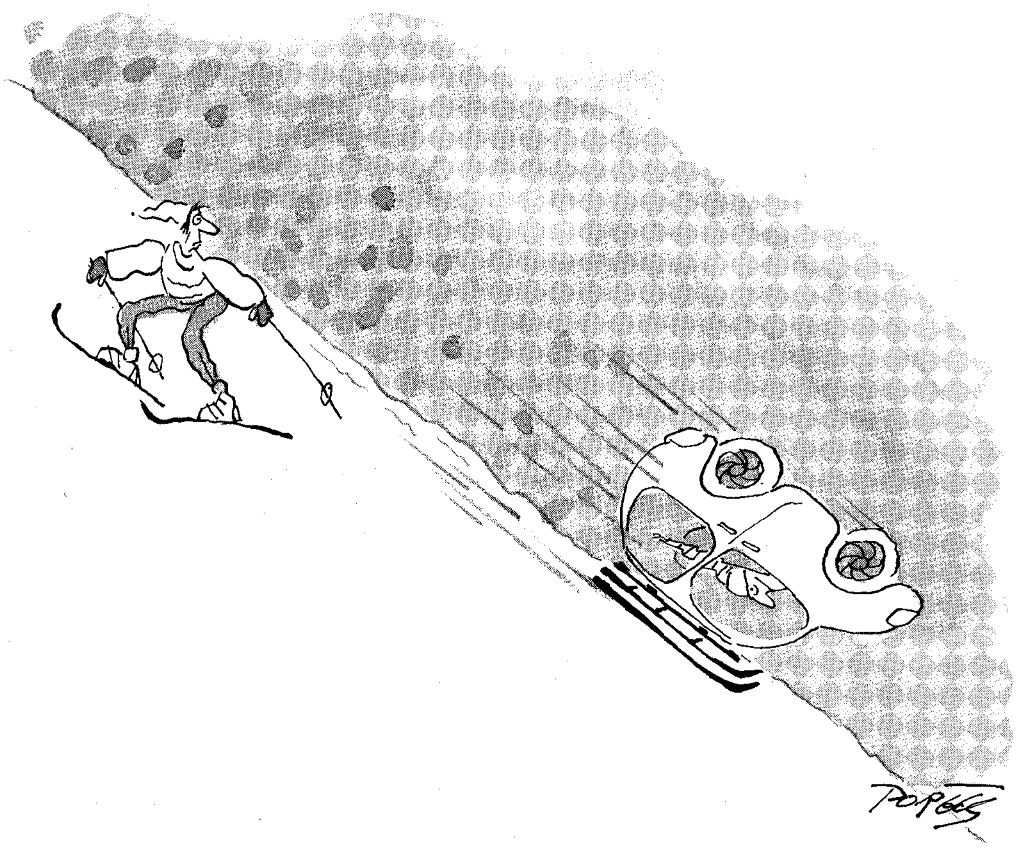
Above, an 1860 edition of "Die Forelle" ("The Trout"), a song that shows Schubert in a childlike, playful mood; at left, a detail from a Gustav Klimt painting (destroyed during the Second World War) that hints at Schubert's enigmas.



with Schubert's works like teen-age crushes. Most of all, I remember playing through the first movement of the great Piano Sonata in B-Flat and physically trembling as the main theme stole back onto the page, one octave higher, like a pale, beautiful ghost of itself. All the turmoil in Schubert scholarship has come about because people love the music so, even if the cryptic data of his life have led biographers to radically different conclusions. And it has also come about because the music, so rich in its understanding of emotion, sends out profoundly ambivalent messages. Schubert indeed wrote melodies of unaffected beauty, childlike in their innocence. He was also capable of rhythmic and harmonic violence that would not be equalled until Wagner. And he could play the whole gamut of emotion as one ambiguous chord, dissolving differences between agony and joy.

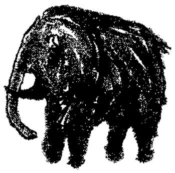
What was he like? It's safe to hazard a few guesses. He was friendly, up to a point; rude, when pressed; very shy or very arrogant, or probably both at once. He was colossally ambitious. He made a career and a religion of music; he was a voracious reader who constantly tested the musical capability of texts. He could not grovel in front of potential patrons, yet he worked tolerably hard at self-promotion. His leisure hours were drunkenly aimless. He formed intense friendships with men, younger than himself as he got older. He worshipped women, but from afar. He theorized love more than he experienced it. He was prone both to euphoria and to paralyzing melancholy, but he always steadied himself with work. He was more a watcher of life than a participant in it: he had little time for anything unrelated to his art. There were no limits whatsoever to his musical imagination.

The bicentennial of Schubert's birth falls on January 31st; we will hear a lot of him this year. A calendar I obtained from the Schubert Institute Web pages lists, among hundreds of events, a five-hour concert in London's Wigmore Hall, three dozen lieder recitals presented by West German Radio, and some sixty Schubert events all across the great state of Maine. The New York season includes mini-festivals by the New York Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the 92nd Street Y; song cycles with the masterly duo of Peter Schreier and Andras Schiff; and concerts by the Alban Berg Quartet, of Vienna. Among the slew of new books are biographies by Elizabeth McKay and Brian Newbould, a major study of Schubert's songs by Susan Youens, and a new edition of John Reed's Schubert companion. Significant recording projects include the complete string quartets with the excellent young Leipzig Quartet, on MDG, and the four-hand piano works, on Sony. The grandest homage of all is the Hyperion label's project to record the complete lieder, which is nearing the end of a thirty-six-volume series; the pianist Graham Johnson plays brilliantly throughout, and his book-length program notes deliver as rich a portrait of Schubert as anyone else's in print.

All these activities together won't come close to encompassing Schubert: a thousand works written in a period of less than twenty years. Contemplating the whole catalogue, you feel the appeal of what might be called the Sane, Positivist version of the composer's career, which is more or less the one delivered in the excellent studies by John Reed and Brian Newbould. Here was a brilliant young man who achieved a great deal in very little time. A favorite exercise for measuring Schubert's achievement is to imagine how other composers might be remembered if they had died at the age of thirty-one. Verdi, composer of "Nabucco"? Beethoven, composer of numerous piano sonatas and one Symphony in C? J. S. Bach, distinguished writer of organ music? Mozart would remain Mozart, even without "The Magic Flute." But Schubert could have died at the age of eighteen, after writing "Erlkönig" and two hundred other lieder, and still leave intact his reputation as an epoch-making composer of song.

I noticed one interesting omission in the birthday concerts: nothing is listed for the Vienna Philharmonic, the orchestra associated with the Society of Friends of Music, to which Schubert once belonged. Never apt to follow fashion, the Philharmonic will play an all-Mozart program on January 31st. Although Schubert will not be otherwise neglected in Vienna, it's useful to remember that he had a hard time making his name in that city—particularly as a composer working in the Classical tradition. Around 1820, sonatas, quartets, and symphonies became unfashionable; the rage was for dance tunes, Italian opera (not always the most artful kind), and the virtuosity of Paganini. Biedermeier kitsch was coming to the fore. Schubert's first song publication came, unpromisingly, in the "Pictorial Pocket-Book for Friends of Interesting Regional, Natural, and Artistic Curiosities of the Austrian Monarchy."

Although composers flocked to Vienna in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Schubert was the only major one before Arnold Schoenberg to be native to the city. He was picked to sing in the Court Chapel choir, now the Vienna Boys' Choir, and to study with the eminent Kapellmeister Antonio Salieri. (This is the same Salieri who was said to have poisoned Mozart. Let's give the poor man a break—he was civil to Mozart and generous to Schubert.) The chapel's thorough conservative teaching set Schubert apart from the precedent-shattering virtuosos and genius amateurs who would dominate the coming Romantic generation. A grounding in bel canto is apparent in everything he wrote: at times he looks forward to the limpid arias of Bellini, Donizetti, and even Verdi. (One buoyant waltzing song called "Im Haine" comes tantalizingly close to "La donna è mobile.") This composer is also capable of dazzling musical games. Newbould recently discovered a perfect musical palindrome—nineteen bars repeated in mirror formation—in the melodrama "Die Zauberharfe." Schubert's seemingly intuitive, "natural" voice is a product of craft and sophistication.



Schubert discovered his mature musical voice at the age of seventeen—specifically, in the last months of 1814. His most celebrated breakthrough was the song "Gretchen am Spinnrade," from Goethe's "Faust." The propulsive, repetitive piano accompaniment, an archetypal feat of tone painting, depicts the mechanical whirl of Gretchen's spinning wheel as she sings of her uneasy passion. The wavelike rise and fall of the vocal line points ahead to the mournful climax of the "Unfinished" Symphony. "Nachtgesang," a second major Goethe setting, reveals Schubert's ability to muse upon simple harmonies and transform them into rich-hued, painterly subjects. Songs dominated this period, but September of 1814 also brought his first characteristic instrumental work—the String Quartet in B-Flat, with its juxtaposition of melting melody and spectral harmonic wanderings.

The years 1816 to 1822 were unsettled. In his songwriting Schubert was sometimes self-consciously classical, sometimes boldly experimental. He left various instrumental works mysteriously incomplete, notably the "Unfinished" Symphony. Seeking a fortune in the mainstream market, he made numerous attempts at opera, most of them undermined by idiotic librettos and theatrical inexperience. (The anniversary year will bring a few revivals of the Schubert operas, including a concert performance by the New York Chamber Symphony of the unfinished, quasi-Wagnerian opera-oratorio "Lazarus.") Instrumental forms regained importance from 1822 to 1828: Schubert wrote his two mature symphonies and embarked on a tour de force of chamber and piano masterpieces, with Beethoven as his model. He also invented an entirely new form—the epic song cycle. "Die schöne Müllerin" and "Winterreise" were the two he completed. A further cycle, on poems of Heinrich Heine, was under way. (The so-called "Schwanengesang" cycle, which includes the six Heine songs, is a publisher's invention.)

Beethoven died in 1827. In the close confines of Vienna, Schubert and Beethoven had, oddly, never met. The older biographies depict Schubert as a terrified admirer, fleeing rooms to avoid confronting his hero. More likely, he was too proud to show the obsequiousness that his admiration would have demanded. John Reed suggests that Schubert saw Beethoven's death as an opening: the throne of music was empty. He scheduled his first, and only, public concert on the anniversary of Beethoven's death; he produced songs on poems Beethoven had intended to set; he wrote his String Quintet in fulfillment of another Beethoven project; and he prepared an edition of three piano sonatas, a favorite grouping of Beethoven's youth. And, at the end, he began a D-major symphony that scholars have recently identified as a sort of Tombeau de Beethoven, complete with a central elegy in B minor.

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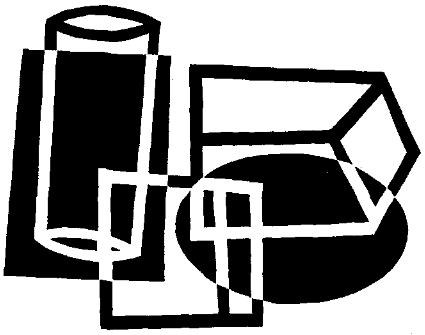
(Peter Gülke's completion of the slow movement—austere, archaic, yet devastating—will be played by the Cleveland Orchestra on January 30th.) Even when he realized he wouldn't make it, he kept to the program. "Beethoven does not lie here," he mumbled on his deathbed, apparently requesting that he be buried beside the Master. And he was.

THERE is, of course, more to the story than this. Schubert was the last of the Classical masters, but he was also in many ways the first Romantic, subjecting music to what Charles Rosen calls, in "The Romantic Generation," the "disorder of experience." Both as man and musician, he was prey to storms of emotion. Moodiness seems inherent in his style: his very first works show restless motion from one tonality to another, a habit of incessant modulation that would remain one of his principal signatures. And his urge to picture torrents of feeling led him to an obsessive study of poetry: he was—and remains—among the most literary of composers. The poetry and the poets who were part of his life in turn raise some fiendishly difficult questions about aesthetics, politics, psychology, and sexuality. Some of the most important research of recent years—that by Susan Youens, Richard Kramer, David Gramit, and Graham Johnson—has focussed on the relationship between Schubert and the poets who furnished texts for his more than six hundred songs.

Schubert lived in a dusky, transitional time. As he came to maturity, the ideals of the Napoleonic period had come crashing down, and monarchies across Europe celebrated Restoration with repression. Prince Metternich's regime in Austria was nothing short of a police state. Some members of artistic circles still agitated for revolution, but most embraced the decorous, orderly aesthetic of the Biedermeier period. Schubert arrived on the scene just after the high Romantic period in German literature—the age of Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, and Hölderlin. Music, as always, was running behind literature; it had yet to exploit the full Romantic welter of feeling, although Beethoven did make a start. So Schubert was caught in what turned out to be a productive paradox: he helped to inaugurate musical Romanticism yet joined a literary scene that was moving on to other concerns.

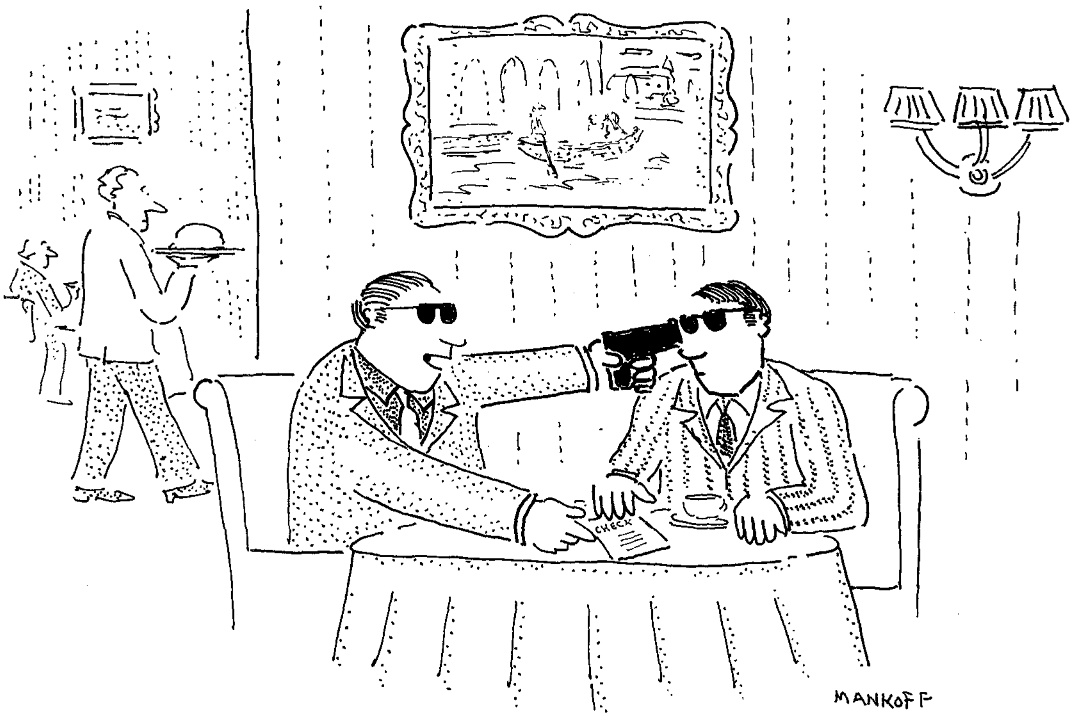
From the start, Schubert sought an unprecedented integration of poetry and music. In 1816, with his friend Josef Spaun, he drew up a plan for eight volumes of songs inspired by well-known poets, beginning with Goethe. Unfortunately, the plan relied on the hope that Goethe himself would promote it. Spaun mailed off an elegant collection of Schubert songs; Goethe, whose multifarious genius grew curiously feeble in the realm of music, did not respond. Despite that setback, Schubert pushed toward his greatest innovation, the song cycle. He was probably heartened by—but by no means dependent on—the example of Beethoven's interrelated "Distant Beloved" songs. Richard Kramer argues that the song-cycle category should include not only the famous "Die schöne Müllerin" and "Winterreise" but also a cycle on poems by the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel; Johnson proposes a cycle for the semi-deranged erotomanic poet Ernst Schulze. (Volumes 18 and 27 of the Hyperion edition, sung by Peter Schreier and Matthias Görne, give a gripping hint of what these might have been like.) Months before his death, Schubert began setting Heine, who was well reviewed but not yet famous: the composer's literary instincts had become razor-sharp.

Schubert's love of poetry is inseparable from the close-knit friendships that dominated his social life from 1814 until his death. Spaun, a fellow-student at the Court Chapel, had drawn him into a group called the *Bildung* circle, which consisted of young men from various artistic professions, dedicated to *Bildung* (the great German pastime of intellectual self-improvement), literary readings, aesthetic debate, and friendship. At first glance, these young men appear to have been a band of poetry-reciting layabouts out of "La Bohème," their own poetry innocuous and sentimental, but in fact they were serious and sometimes daring in their pursuits. Most poetry came Schubert's way through books and manuscripts exchanged in the circle; he had no money to buy books of his own. In terms of literary accomplishment, the most impressive member of the group was a poet named Johann Mayrhofer, and he became arguably the most significant influence on Schubert's mind.



Mayrhofer, about whom much is learned in Susan Youens's remarkable book, "Schubert's Poets and the Making of Lieder," was a man of extreme contradictions. He was steeped in the world of ancient Greece; his politics tended toward revolutionary liberalism; yet he worked as a censor for the Metternich regime. He was reclusive, morose, misogynistic, self-critical, and in all likelihood homosexual. He killed himself in 1836. His poems sometimes make use of disjointed, dreamlike images that look beyond Romanticism to the nightmare Symbolism of Georg Trakl. At the same time, however, he championed art as an impersonal, light-suffusing force for order, against the Romantic grain. Schubert was closest to this very odd character from 1816 to 1820; they shared an apartment for eighteen months. During this time, Schubert's songs concentrated heavily on mythological subjects, not only by way of Mayrhofer's poetry but also by way of Schiller's and Goethe's. The forty-seven Mayrhofer settings themselves have a peculiarly unsettled quality that seems to mirror the character of the poet.

The song "Auf der Donau," for example, is a weird scene on the Danube that begins with conventional Romantic images of waves, forests, and castles and ends with visions of doom (*Untergang*). Schubert matches the poem's trajectory from idyll to disaster: as Youens observes, the song ends in a jarringly different key from the one in which it began, and *Untergang* arrives in ice-cold tones at the bottom of the keyboard. Other Mayrhofer poems, however, contain suggestions that Schubert did not readily take up. "Uraniens Flucht" is an ode to the mythological figure of Urania—not the Muse of Astronomy but the goddess Aphrodite under another name. Graham Johnson observes that the poem's cryptic scenario, in which a genderless "loving couple" worships the goddess, makes sense only as code for homoerotic love. (Johnson leaves out the clincher, though: the citation of Urania in Plato's "Symposium" as a protectress of love between men.) More remains to be discovered in Mayrhofer's obscure erotic zone: for example, the implications of his libretto for Schubert's unfinished opera "Adrast," which might have contained one of the few same-sex love arias in opera; and a strangely sentimentalized scene of self-castration in the poem "Atys" (based on Catullus).



"I insist."

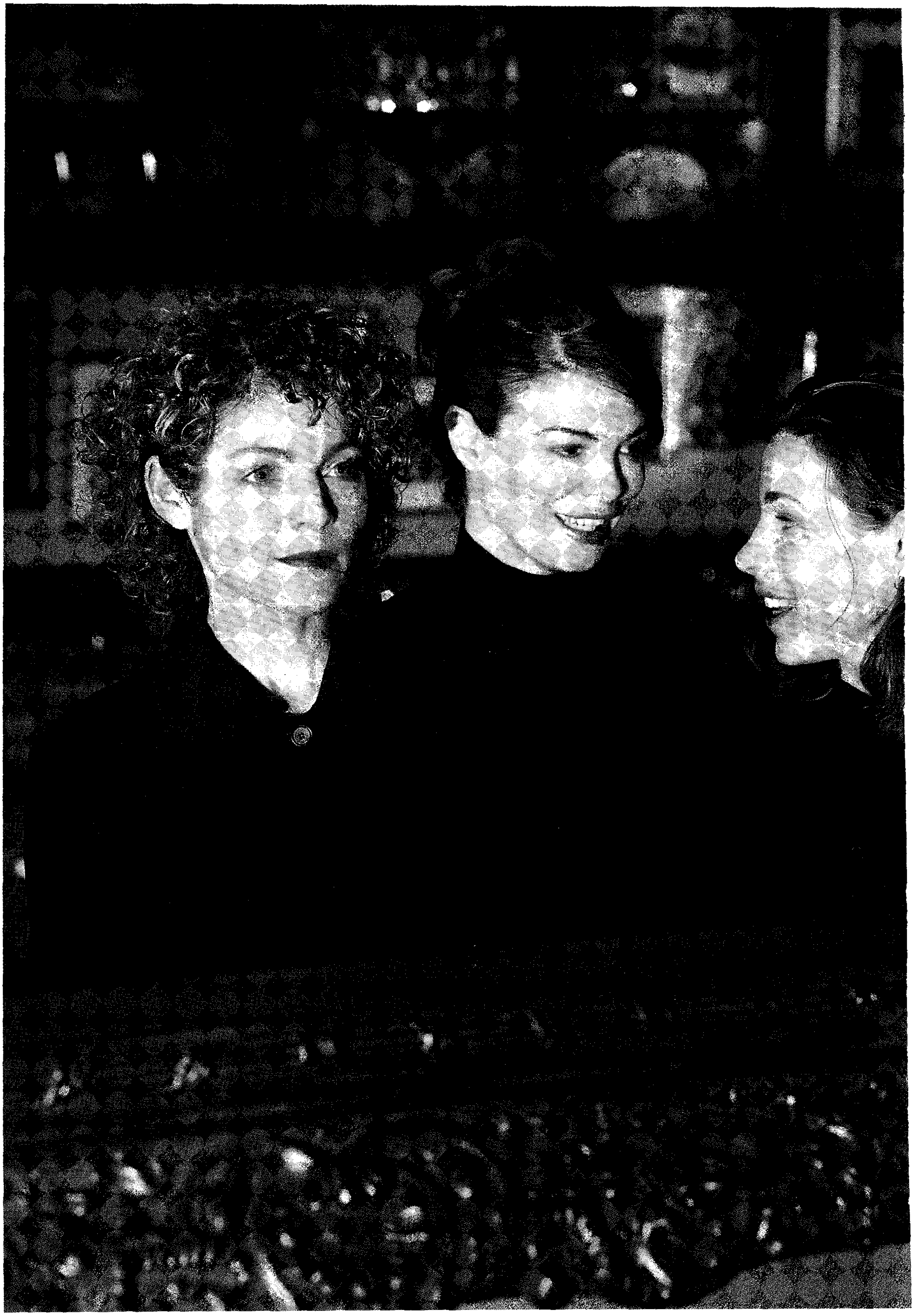
• •

Curiouser and curiouser. But there was a break between Schubert and Mayrhofer in 1820. The composer moved to another apartment and ceased working from Mayrhofer's manuscripts. In the next two years, Schubert's life veered toward crisis. He was present at the scene of a disturbance involving Johann Senn, an activist in pro-democratic, anticlerical student politics; Metternich's police placed Senn in lengthy confinement and briefly questioned Schubert. Schubert seems to have made a mute protest against his friend's arrest by publishing songs on two Senn poems in 1823. In that same collection, he set "Die Liebe hat gelogen" ("Love has lied"), by the German poet August von Platen, who was also a political dissident and—incidentally or not—was as close to an outspoken homosexual as the era would permit. (Platen, like Mayrhofer, used the unhappy ancient Greek figure Adrastus as code: in his diaries, one of his amours goes by that name.) Meanwhile, Franz von Schober, the handsome bad boy of the circle, seems to have led Schubert on adventures in low life. By the end of this "wild period," in 1822, Schubert had contracted syphilis.

Needless to say, all this raises questions about Schubert's own sexual identity. The issue came to the fore of Schubert scholarship in 1989, when the musical biographer Maynard Solomon published a brilliant, subversive essay entitled "Franz Schubert and the Peacocks of Benvenuto Cellini," suggesting that Schubert was homosexual and was part of a gay subculture. Solomon's thesis was based not only on the Mayrhofer friendship but also on unexplained oddities in the documentary record, notably an entry in the diary of Eduard von Bauernfeld—the same troublemaking friend who recorded Schubert's foot-stamping tirade—saying that "Schubert is half-sick (he needs 'young peacocks,' like Benvenuto Cellini)." Peacocks, Solomon pointed out, are in Cellini's autobiography not so subtle code for young men he has seduced. Also significant in this respect were some euphemistic-sounding accounts of Schubert's attitude toward women (phrases such as a "dominating aversion for the daughters of Eve" and "indifferent to the charms of the fair sex") and the composer's renunciation of marriage in an 1816 diary.

The musicological furor over Solomon's article was unenlightening. It told more about anxieties over sexuality at both ends of the spectrum than about anything in Schubert's nature. Conservative elements shouted down the "homosexual Schubert" as a categorical impossibility. One Austrian scholar mounted an attack on American "political correctness" that read like a Dada collage of the writings of Hilton Kramer: somehow, the scholar concluded, the Afrocentrism of Leonard Jeffries was behind it all. Bigger absurdities were still to come: Susan McClary, a pioneer in the field of feminist musicology, listened to the Andante of the "Unfinished" Symphony and heard an "open, flexible sense of self"—a supposedly gay voice evident in musical procedures. This argument depended on stereotypes of Schubert's "gentleness," which countless episodes in his music contradict; it also depended on tedious stereotypes of homosexuality itself.

Some fair-minded scholars have had trouble accepting Solomon's conclusions. The argument is indeed speculative, but Solomon is also able to show that presumptions of a heterosexual Schubert are no less speculative, and that no reliable evidence for *any* romantic relationship exists—not even for Schubert's often-mentioned attachment to the soprano Therese Grob. Those who have tried to rebut Solomon's article—among them Elizabeth McKay, in her new biography—have simply dreamed up new fantasies of heterosexual affairs in the conditional tense: "If Schubert fell in love with the 'bewitching Sophie' . . . it would not be surprising," and so on. In between the protectively cheery anecdotes, his friends admitted the unresolved mysteries of his nature. "They greatly praise *Schubert*, but it is said that



he conceals himself," goes a fascinating entry in Beethoven's conversation books. All signs suggest that Schubert hung back from commitment to anyone or anything, yet his syphilitic condition after 1822 indicates that he found a physical outlet for his sexuality. To paraphrase Bob Dylan, something's going on here, but we don't know what it is.

We know at least that Schubert emerged from all this turmoil a changed man. He devoted himself again to Classical forms: first to piano sonatas, then to chamber music and the symphony. In 1824, he wrote the A-Minor and "Death and the Maiden" Quartets in quick succession; and just before beginning work on "Death and the Maiden" he had turned, almost as a symbolic act, to Mayrhofer's poetry for the last time. He chose poems that speak of self-purification, recognition of the inaccessibility of Love, and wakefulness in a sleeping world. The most remarkable of the group is "Auflösung" ("Dissolution"), in which Mayrhofer shouts in his most visionary voice, "Go under, world, and never more disturb / These sweet, ethereal choirs." The images resonate with those of a murky poem that the composer himself had written during the previous, illness-ridden year, entitled "My Prayer": this also speaks of *Untergang*, self-abnegation, self-transformation. "Kill it, kill me with it," Schubert wrote of his life up to that time.

It is difficult to describe the nearly Wagnerian music that Schubert brings to "Auflösung": dark, rolling chords on the piano, whiplash changes of key, incongruously grand phrases on the word "sweet," a slide back down to banging low notes and stammerings of "Go under," and a tenuous resolution at the end. (Brigitte Fassbaender delivers a hair-raising rendition of this song in the Hyperion series.) "Auflösung" is, I think, a great early feat of Romantic confession, but Schubert would not write more songs like it. He would not write a "history of my feelings," to use the phrase that Count Platen applied to his amazingly frank diaries. Although Schubert was now verifiably doomed, ensconced in the ultimate Romantic predicament, he would bury emotion more deeply in music. "Death and the Maiden" is a pure Classical composition, written according to the old rules.

The feelings, suddenly, are ours.

WE are back where traditional musicologists like to have us—with "the music itself." History holds traces of a powerful personality, but it seems as if the life had been raided, robbed, emptied by a ruthless devotion to art. The music, again, has an uncommonly immediate presence. Schubert is somehow more with us than most of the bust-on-the-piano classics. Contemporary composers look to him as a colleague and search his scores for new paths. Consider how many recent compositions have taken off from Schubertian suggestions—Luciano Berio's "Rendering," John Harbison's "November 19, 1828" (the date, of course, of Schubert's death), Edison Denisov's "Lazarus," and Hans Zender's bizarre orchestration of "Winterreise," to name a few. Meanwhile, Schubert himself seems to be still composing: different editors' "realizations" of his numerous unfinished pieces arrive every few years.

At the end of the line, at the limits of what music can express, are the masterpieces that appeared between 1823 and 1828: the last three quartets, the two piano trios, the String Quintet, the last eight or so piano sonatas, the Ninth Symphony, and the song cycles. In his final years, Schubert writes with greater detachment and greater economy of

PANACHE À TROIS

Cast three major stars in Chekhov's "Three Sisters" and you might expect a certain measure of sibling rivalry. But Scott Elliott, who is directing Amy Irving, Jeanne Tripplehorn, and Lili Taylor as the despairing, hopeful trio in the Roundabout Theatre's production (currently in previews), claims to have had no such problems. Although their strong individuality is what attracted him in the first place, their chemistry, he says, "creates a glamour that somehow transcends it." The director is unabashed about using Tinseltown glimmer to draw a larger, younger audience to Chekhov, but he's also quick to point out the "extraordinary ensemble work" of his cast. "The focus is on the sisters' strength and resiliency, on the family. There will be no star turns."

Photograph by Eric Boman

means but also with an increasing flair for the bigger forms. All his youthful innovations are mobilized as a way of controlling large structures. He uses his modulations and ambiguous chords to create subtle changes of color in a sprawling landscape. He opens up space by distributing figures through far-flung registers of the piano, or by spreading a filigreed texture of sound through the strings. In that space, one voice might cry out, like the amazing second cello line in the String Quintet, or instruments might repeat a rhythm incessantly to give a sense of travelling motion.

In some ways, the late works are highly conservative in form. In others, they enter regions that other composers would not touch for decades. The G-Major Quartet of 1826 is perhaps the most "advanced" of all: it looks past the nineteenth century to the twentieth. The venturesomeness of the harmony does not come by way of dissonance—the usual index of progressive musical thinking. Schubert is able to exploit tensions in the tonal system without resorting to the chromatic congestion that had begun in Beethoven and would end in Schoenberg. In this quartet, and in other later pieces, he underpins his modulations with an unprecedented whole-tone scale, which would become the foundation of Impressionism; tonality has been subverted from within. This kind of stealthy harmonic revolution has fascinated composers seeking to reconstitute a tonal language in the late twentieth century. I attended a lecture by György Ligeti a few years ago in which he held up the G-Major Quartet as a crucial influence on his current style.

The song cycles, too, blend convention and revolution. A more spare and cutting style emerges from the simple-seeming, subtly inflected poetry of Wilhelm Müller and the ironically stylized ballads of Heine. Their tales of unhappy love, set in archetypal, not quite real places, like the Mill, the Village, and the Inn, shift from a Romantic here-and-now to an interior plane. "Winterreise" casts a very cool gaze on despair: it has something in common with Wallace Stevens's "mind of winter," contemplating "nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." The six Heine songs of 1828 are fastidious portraits of derangement. Some admirers of Heine think they miss the poet's sardonic tone: true, they do not amuse, but their ferociousness is entirely apt. Schubert's powers now extend to the musicalizing of literary abstractions. In "Der Doppelgänger," the narrator sees his "double" and feels he has become a ghost himself, watching his own ridiculous life. Setting the scene, Schubert writes an acutely unnerving progression in B minor in which each chord has been lobotomized by the surgical removal of one note.

Listeners often have the idea that Schubert in his late period is looking into the face of death. The String Quintet in C and the Piano Sonata in B-Flat, both of which were finished in September of 1828, do sound like a self-conscious farewell and summing up. The sequence of events of the Quintet's Adagio—a halting, nearly unbearably wistful principal theme; a vehement central section; a return to the first theme, enfeebled but somehow ever more lovely; the briefest flash again of anger; then a passage into silence—seems to show an awareness, a defiance, and then an acceptance of death. But this is the story that Schubert told from the beginning—the going forth of beautiful melody, crack-up or collapse, a recovery of peace. The B-flat sonata, so grand and calm and mysterious, refines this story to an extreme of subtlety. Its principal theme bestows grace for seven measures. Then a trill rumbles ominously in the bass. Then the theme resumes, as if nothing had happened.

It remains to mention the Great C-Major Symphony, which the New York Philharmonic and the Cleveland Orchestra will both play in New York on the young man's two-hundredth birthday. We call it the Ninth, but Schubert probably considered it his First—the first "grand symphony," worthy of Beethoven's mantle. Sketched during an 1825 trip through the Austrian Alps, it seems to document the overcoming of morbidity, of all Romantic fascination with death. The force of the effort is both exhilarating and frightening. In the finale, the composer returns to a scene of innocence—a huge rustic dance, heralded by fanfares. By the end, the ceremony borders on violence: the note C is repeatedly slammed down in the bass regions of the orchestra while a wild sequence of chords pivots around it. For all the world, it sounds like the stamp of a foot of a man reaching for the stars. ♦

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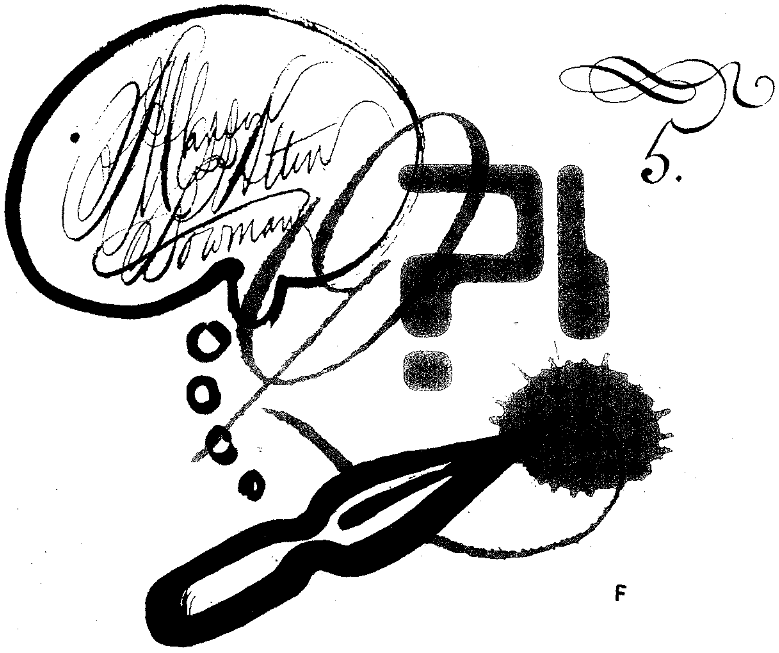
MINDING YOUR “P”S AND “Q”S

The changing fortunes of penmanship.

BY THOMAS MALLON

I WONDER what Yeats, who in the nineteen-twenties smiled upon Montessori nuns and their students as being “neat in everything / In the best modern way,” would have made of my early-nineteen-sixties public-school classroom. There, a streamlined stainless-steel utility was the rule: under the bold face of the unticking Simplex clock we filled in standardized “California” tests with machine-readable pencil marks and a sense that our labors were leading not just onward and upward but eventually *ad astra.* The clean contours of the Mercury space capsule shining at us through the slide projector were proof.



FILIP PAGOWSKI

In defiance of this futurism sat, in a row of alphabet cards above the blackboard, that beautiful, ball-gowned version of the numeral two: the cursive capital letter “Q.” One knew, even at eight or nine, that in real life one was about as likely to run into that capital as into, say, the capital of “Chad, fmr. French Equatorial Africa.” That “Q” was truly fit for a queen (the stately ancient Victoria, not the slender young Elizabeth II). Its regally useless frills were an extreme case of the curls and pennants flying from the rest of the alphabet—labor-intensive appendages that by sixth grade even strict Mr. Georgi didn’t really expect anyone to bother making.

Although I marvelled at that “Q,” I grew up with a sense that penmanship was antithetical to the serious business of words, the best of which get set in type. The disjunction was confirmed by my adolescent reading of “Nineteen Eighty-Four,” in which Orwell refers to “the neat handwriting of the illiterate.” Years later, doing manuscript research for a doctoral dissertation, I found myself wondering whether my subject, the poet Edmund Blunden, his handwriting calligraphically calm, wasn’t a poorer choice than his sometime friend Robert Graves, whose letters were storms of black ink. The notion that painstaking penmanship betrays a deficient imagination is fairly common; the discovery, a few Presidential campaigns back, that Gary Hart had not only

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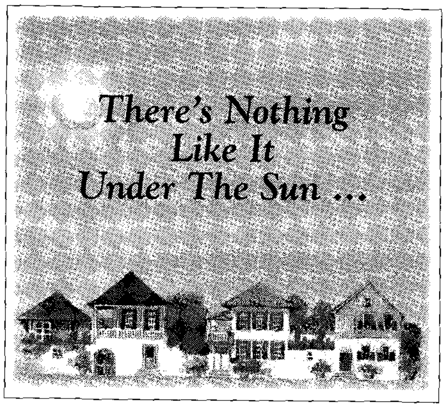

There’s Nothing Like It Under The Sun ...

simplified his name (Hartpence) but also modernized the style of his signature made embarrassing political sense.

"Handwriting in America" (Yale; $30), Tamara Plakins Thornton's cultural history of the subject, is filled with interesting and sometimes corrective information about penmanship and its prejudices. In Colonial times, for example, handwriting, far from being the inevitable accompaniment to instruction in reading ("a universal spiritual necessity"), was taught on a need-to-know basis, usually to those young men who would be trafficking in the commercial world. A lingering snobbery against penmanship's mercantile functions required some gentlemen to secure their class identity by adopting a less straightforward script than the one used by the tradesmen they patronized. Even this was a simplification of the "byzantine system of hands" that then prevailed back in England, where according to "An Essay on Education," written in 1802 by the Reverend William Barrow of London, "a letter was often considered as the more genteel; the less conveniently it could be read."

In the early nineteenth century, a strong connection was made between good penmanship and good character (neatness meant self-discipline), and penmanship itself made the fortune of the writing master Platt Rogers Spencer, who created an ornate feminine hand that kept the fingers busy with all sorts of decorative strokes. With the textbooks he wrote for use in the public schools and a chain of business colleges, Spencer, and a horde of his relatives, dominated the teaching of handwriting well past the Civil War.

At the end of the nineteenth century, another script entrepreneur, named Austin Norman Palmer, came to the opinion that the overly festooned Spencerian hand was lagging behind a restless America. The Palmer method, however billowing and ladylike its results may now appear, was his attempt to butch it up. To Palmer, none of the trick was in the wrist. Thornton explains, "He rejected the use of the fingers to form letters in favor of what he called muscular movement: sweeping motions of the arm from the shoulder powered by a 'driving force' that was both 'positive and assertive.'" The method's rhythms were said to correspond to modernity's own, and its advocates claimed for it a "powerful hygienic effect" on immigrant schoolchildren. These were the same proponents who declared writer's cramp to be a form of neurasthenia, and sinistrals in need of having their left hand bound up. According to Thornton, aging pupils of the method, which was taught until after the Second World War, recall it with "bittersweet memories of a past when moral certainty still seemed possible."

THE history of handwriting analysis—a subject about which Thornton somehow manages to keep a straight face—begins in the Romantic era, when analysts, like that new creature the autograph-seeker, hoped to discover genius lurking in the signatures of the famous and the accomplished. (Edgar Allan Poe was not surprised to find William Cullen Bryant displaying "one of the most commonplace clerk's hands which we ever encountered.") The graphologists who appeared later in the nineteenth century concentrated, as phrenologists did, on ordinary folk. Instead of seeking inked evidence of talent, they were on the prowl for "the hidden characters of potentially dangerous strangers" in the ever more urban world. In this same era, another kind of handwriting professional—one who did not claim the ability to analyze a criminal's character, but only to separate forgeries from the real thing—began to take the stand as an expert witness in criminal trials.

The stage was set for a twentieth-century showdown between characterological and physiological notions of handwritten individuality, and Thornton's book is more than absorbing when it concentrates on the former. The potential for self-discovery through graphology insured that the discipline—which was deemed "intellectually marginal," and therefore practiced largely by women—became wrapped up in the drive toward Dale Carnegie-style betterment. Eager for individuation, the bored and the thwarted began sending letters to graphology columnists in the hope of receiving encouraging analysis. Thornton presents the most popular of these diviners, Louise Rice, as a kind of cursive-conscious Ann Landers, who frequently told her correspondents to wake up and smell the ink. To "Stella," so sure of her own exceptionality, Rice replied, "You bore me more than most persons do."

Thornton also brooks little nonsense: "Handwriting in America" is so well organized that it sometimes seems to be printed on ruled paper. Thornton writes with a measured grace, but one wonders whether she would have avoided phrases like "the conceptual space in which the self has been delineated" if she had produced her book by the leisurely means that is her subject instead of, as one suspects, at the computer keyboard. She addresses the postwar period when progressive education abandoned cursive in favor of printing and began thinking of "the penmanship pupil as a writer, not a handwriter—in other words, as an individual expressing ideas," but she doesn't travel down that slippery slope to a consideration of what has been lost or gained by our cultural shift toward mouse and screen.

These considerations are perhaps beyond Thornton's subject, but one does wish she had pondered what lies beyond the extinction phase in the cultural history of anything American: the comeback. Go onto the Web and match the words "handwriting" and "recognition": any number of sites will present themselves, though the "recognition" involved has nothing to do with character traits—only with the computer's growing ability to interpret not just keystrokes but handwriting entered on a "digitizing tablet" with an electronic "pen." Still, even this second act may be short-lived. Computers have an easier time dealing with print than with cursive, and, by the time they become fully able to "read" the latter, new voice-recognition techniques will probably have rendered the capability obsolete.

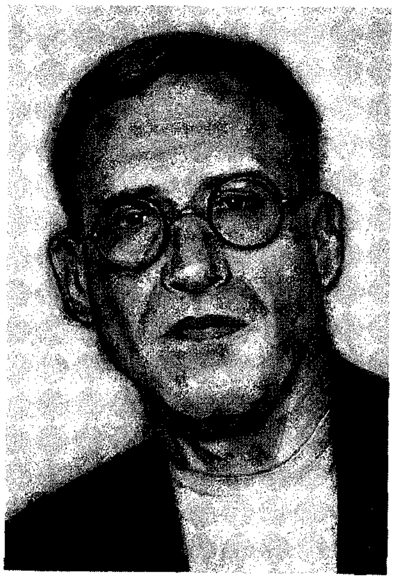
The fax and E-mail have brought back letter-writing to an encouraging extent, but the limits of that revival, too, come to mind indirectly from one of Thornton's rare doubtful assertions—on the subject of autograph collecting. "What appealed to men of wealth, however, was no different from what drew the lowbrow collectors, namely," she writes, "what one of the former termed the thrill of 'divining personal character from an examination of handwriting.'" Physical intimacy—touching exactly what the other person had touched—was more like it, I should say, just as the photograph on a signed *carte de visite* gave one the opportunity to imagine proximity, not just to practice physiognomy. *His* hand touched this page: that particular epistolary thrill is gone for the recipient of a fax, and, while there is a certain pleasurable intimacy in the first flash of an E-mail appearing in one's queue—rather like being tapped on the shoulder at a party—it disappears when the message itself opens up in the same pixels that everybody else is sending.

You can't seal E-mail with a kiss, and the latest laptops protect us from even our own bodily fluids: the Macintosh PowerBooks have eliminated trackballs in favor of trackpads, so that the sweat from one's thumb won't gum up the works. Handwritten love letters showed a physical motion and intensity that corresponded to what the epistolary couple—one writing, the other reading—were fantasizing about. What Thornton describes in the case of Palmer's method as "endlessly repeated push-pulls" was there on the page, in one way or another, whatever method the handwriter had applied, and it was connected to all those other movements that would make him, once he appeared in the flesh, yours truly. ♦

DON'T LOOK BACK

A proposal for our roots-obsessed culture.

BY ALEXANDER STAR



Walter Benn Michaels

JAMES BURRIS

IN the annals of ethnic confusion, it would be hard to find a more emblematic case than that of George Mitchell, the former Democratic senator from Maine. Last year, when Mitchell arrived in Northern Ireland to broker the Ulster peace talks, he was immediately identified by Protestant negotiators as an Irish-American Catholic who would, naturally, be inclined to scheme against them. "I am *not* an Irish-American," he protested to uncomprehending ears. And, while the Orangemen were not convinced, Mitchell had a point.

Mitchell's mother is of Lebanese descent and his father is a child of Irish immigrants who was adopted by a Lebanese-American family. The family's last name is an Anglicization of an ancestral Lebanese patronymic, and their Catholicism stems from their adherence to Lebanon's Maronite Church. No wonder Belfast was bewildered: Mitchell possessed an Irish name and professed an Irish faith, yet neither of these familiar attributes had anything to do with his Irish ancestry.

If nothing else, Mitchell's experience suggests that the notion of ethnic identity can go seriously awry. Why is it so tempting to explain people's actions in terms of their identity, and their identity in terms of their ancestry? These questions, and the historical circumstances that have given rise to them, are the subject of Walter Benn Michaels's "Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism" (Duke; $24.95), which is a fierce and original polemic against the current fixation on lost ancestors and recovered identities. But Michaels is not advancing another plea to put aside old grievances for the sake of national unity. In fact, his book is likely to prove equally discomforting to multiculturalists and to their patriotic critics.

In the contemporary academy, where Michaels labors as a professor of English at Johns Hopkins, the fascination with self-description goes very deep. Even those who oppose the idea of a fixed and coherent identity spend much of their time cooking up ever more sophisticated manners of auto-identification. (The author of one recent academic book notes, "Speaking from my positions as a pro-black, biracial, ex-working-class, New York-based feminist, left cultural critic adds even greater complexity to the way I negotiate and analyze the social world.") Michaels, however, thinks that it might be better if we just junked the whole apparatus of what he calls "identitarian-

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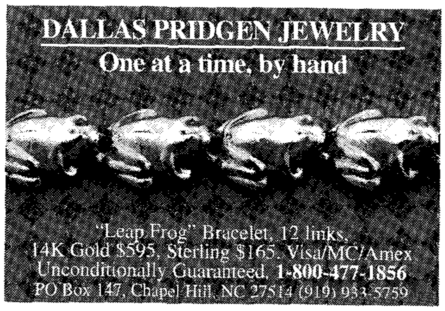

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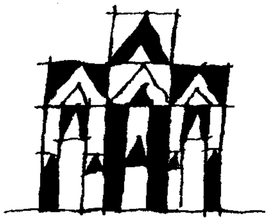
ism." Partisans of both the left and the right make the mistake of trying to explain "what we do" and "what we mean" in terms of "who we are"—and in doing so, he believes, they are only reproducing the immutable categories and biological prejudices of nineteenth-century racism.

WRITING as a cultural historian, Michaels traces contemporary America's romance with identity back to the nineteen-twenties, when the country's borders were tightly sealed and rumors of sinister foreign influence were widely heard. The promotion and protection of identity was a subject of abiding concern in both politics and literature. In 1925, Calvin Coolidge announced that "we have a great desire to be supremely American"—not supremely rich or powerful or good but supremely American. For Coolidge, identity wasn't just a description of who we are; it was a responsibility to live up to, a dream to fulfill.



Coolidge's brand of thinking was not new, but it was everywhere; its imprint could be seen both on ardent nativists, who had succeeded in establishing strict immigration quotas in 1924, and on tolerant pluralists, who hoped that the United States would prove hospitable to a variety of distinct, "culturally autonomous" ethnic groups. Both parties were opposed to the traditional ideal of assimilation because it threatened the preservation of identity. To the nativists, it was clear that dark-skinned immigrants could never fully assimilate; they were irremediably "other," and their presence could serve only to dilute the Nordic race. The more cosmopolitan pluralists, for their part, feared that cultural traditions would vanish in the great American melting pot; it was better, they believed, for immigrants to preserve their own customs, and hence make America into a proudly diverse federation of nations.

Yet both sides, for all their differences, were united in their commitment to one central and, at that time, quite radical idea—the idea that "one prefers one's own race not because it is superior but because it is one's own." A major intellectual revolution of the twenties was the replacement of the West's traditional, hierarchical view of civilizations with a more generous belief in the existence of distinct, and equally valuable, cultures. For anthropologists like Franz Boas and Melville J. Herskovits, human beings were crucially distinguished by their customs rather than by their blood, and no set of customs was inherently superior to any other.

Michaels shows, however, that this replacement of race with culture, and of superiority with diversity, was neither as simple nor as liberating as it might seem. The new idioms were quickly adopted by even the most ardent bigots: the language of cloaked racism was born. In 1927, a fear-mongering nativist named Lothrop Stoddard, the author of "The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy," wrote, "When we discuss immigration we had better stop theorizing about superiors and inferiors and get down to the bedrock of *difference*." In a similar spirit, an Indiana Klansman remarked that "Ku Kluxism cherishes no hostility to Catholics, Jews, negroes, or foreigners as such. . . . Its implications are not those of inferiority, but those of difference." The Klan even adopted "Difference Not Inferiority" as one of its slogans. Half a century later, David Duke is still reading from the same score.

Michaels's larger point is that the new emphasis on culture and diversity led, paradoxically, to a greater obsession with distinguishing people by their origins. In fact, the cultural pluralist proves to be more committed to the idea of human differences than anyone else is. For, if an individual's actions can be judged not by a universal standard but only by the standards of a particular group, it is necessary to determine which group's standards apply. And to know that, it is necessary to know which group the individual belongs to. According to the pluralist, you can't know what to do unless you know who you are, and you can't know who you are unless you know where you come from.

Furthermore, the notion of "where you come from" always returns to race. Once a culture is defined as something of value—as an inheritance that can be taken up or abandoned, protected or betrayed—the supposedly discredited idea of the primacy of bloodlines reasserts itself, however silently. That's because it makes no sense to talk of people's abandoning or betraying their culture unless they are tied to that culture by some unspoken, biological link. If your culture is really an inheritance, if it's a bond that connects you to "your past," then your connection to that culture turns out to be indistinguishable from your membership in a race. As Michaels puts it, "To be a Navajo you have to do Navajo things, but you can't really count as doing Navajo things unless you already are a Navajo."

EVEN the literary classics of the twenties, Michaels believes, were caught in the grip of such racial thinking. Perhaps the most unwelcome claim in "Our America" is that so many of the decade's great books reveal a preoccupation with viewing the American people as an embattled race. Take, for example, three prominent novels of the period, at least two of which are inescapable in classrooms today: Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby," Hemingway's "The Sun Also Rises," and Willa Cather's "The Professor's House." It may be difficult to regard these texts as nativist sermons, but Michaels does succeed in showing that they owe at least something to the nativist temper of the times.

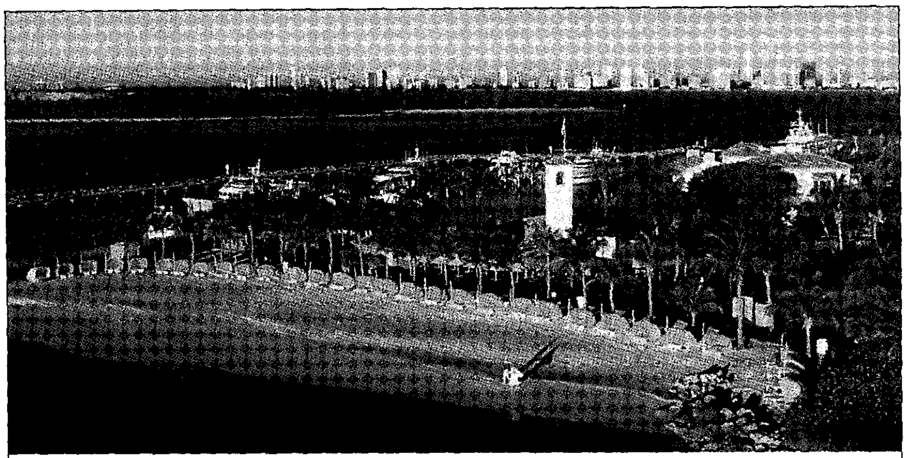
Certainly the resemblances on the level of plot are startling. In each book, an outsider of dubious parentage threatens to mix his genes with those of a woman who comes from kinder, gentler stock. Will the shadowy Gatsby (né Gatz) steal Daisy Buchanan away from her all-American husband, Tom? Will Robert Cohn, the Jewish boxing champion at Princeton, win over Brett and relieve her children of their Anglo-Saxon heritage? Should an unpleasantly ambitious Jew have been allowed to marry a distinguished professor's daughter? In these novels, Michaels maintains, the ultimate question is the purity of the group. Marriage is always a problem because it introduces a mysterious stranger into the family. Accordingly, the authors of these books turned their attention to incest and impotence and homosexuality, which offered a means of refusing reproduction and so of preserving the purity of the bloodline.

Michaels's literary interpretations betray a certain strain. He hardly takes into account the carefully crafted ambivalence of Fitzgerald's and Hemingway's narrators, and rushes to the conclusion that for writers of the twenties "the stakes are more national than personal." Still, he convincingly demonstrates that the preservation of a collective identity—whether the nation's or the family's—is a significant concern for the isolated stoics who inhabit so many novels of the time. In book after book, it is the subject of great heartache and foreboding.

That heartache and foreboding are still present today, of course, even if their manifestations are frequently more subtle. Witness the worried preoccupation in the Jewish community with recalling the Holocaust, and in the black community with recalling slavery. As Michaels pointed out in a recent essay, both of these preoccupations take the curious form of asking people to "remember" something that they never actually experienced. If you belong to the group, you are invited to *remember* its past; if you don't, you can merely *learn about* that past. This kind of logic has been adopted by nearly all the disputants in today's culture wars. Multiculturalists and their liberal foes, like Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., argue over the question of which past should count as ours—the history of the ethnic group and its afflictions or the history of the nation and its accomplishments. In response to all this, Michaels tartly asks, "Why should any past count as ours?" The historical record is full of people who are like us in some ways and not in others. Why insist upon drawing a thick line between those who bestow a cultural inheritance on us and those who don't?

Unlike so many of his academic colleagues, Michaels has little interest in the effort to design more intricate notions of group identity (such as a "mixed race" box on the United States Census form). Rather, he wishes to jettison those notions altogether. They are neither desirable nor necessary. Race, for Michaels, isn't a fact of nature or a social experience; it's an intellectual fallacy. Culture isn't a living tradition or a font of wisdom; it's more like a phantom limb or a false memory.

"Our America" is a brilliant corrective to the excesses of identity politics. But it's less successful in helping us to imagine what life without cultural or racial identities would look like, or even if such a life is possible. Michaels abjures the role of public intellectual: he is ardent in his critiques and austere in his conclusions. Still, it seems fair to say that, in his preferred world, we would have to relinquish the multiculturalist's ideal of cultural integrity, the anti-multiculturalist's ideal of national integrity, and the widespread fear that a culture can be lost or stolen. If a native of Quebec decides to stop speaking French, or if a Jew stops practicing his faith, that may be a shame. But there's no reason to worry that these individuals have "lost" their culture; they've just gone on to something else. "Why does it matter who we are?" Michaels asks, and his answer turns out to be that it doesn't matter very much at all. ♦



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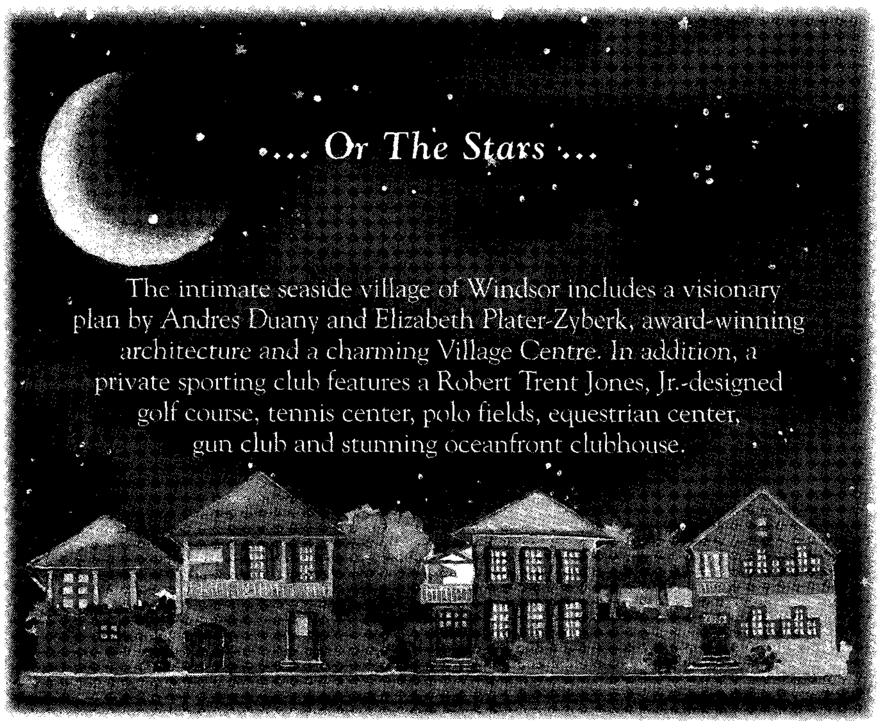

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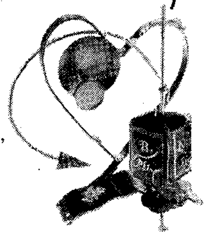

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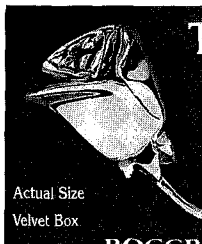

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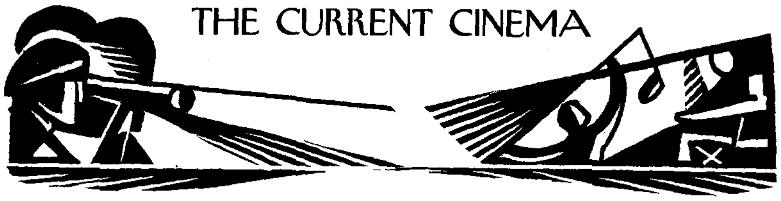

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Hemingway meets his match, and a zoo story goes under.

BY ANTHONY LANE

PEOPLE who buy a ticket for Richard Attenborough's new picture, "In Love and War," could be excused for not knowing what they are about to see. Is it a love film? Is it a war film? As it happens, the truth is more unlikely than anyone could have predicted. "In Love and War" is a comedy. It doesn't know that it's a comedy, and neither cast nor crew appears to operate on the principle that something comic is going on here, but, of course, that only makes it funnier. You could argue, with justice, that it is a one-joke comedy. But what a joke. I laughed when I first got it, and at the end, when most of me had gone to sleep, my smile was still having a ball. The joke is that Ernest Hemingway is played by Chris O'Donnell.

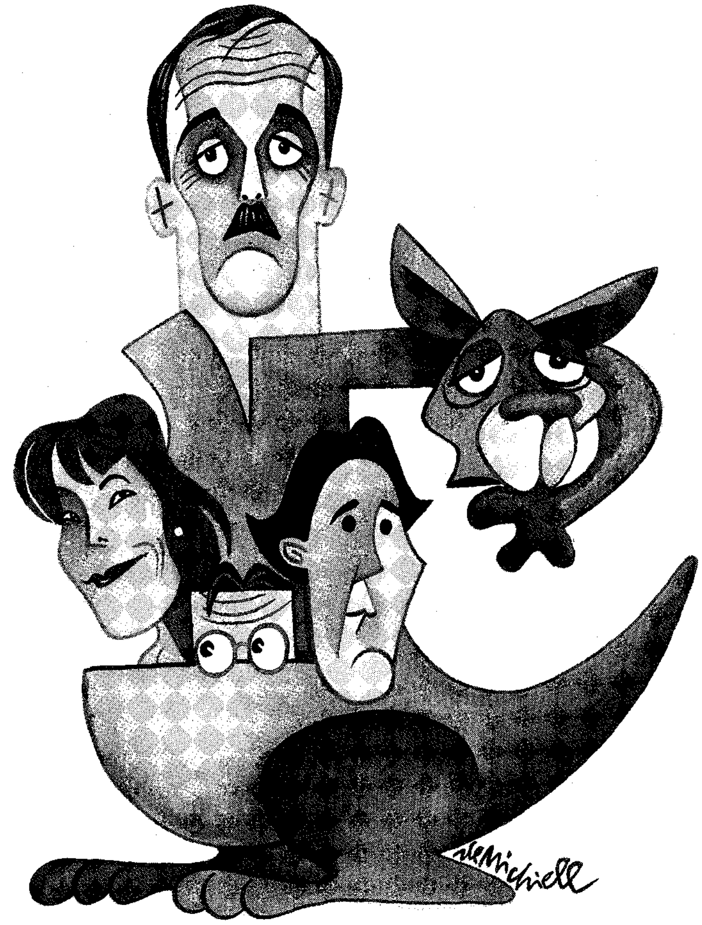
I remember watching "Scent of a Woman" and wondering what this timid, likable boy would do next. As he stood there, fresh-faced, getting bawled out by Al Pacino, he looked like Charlie Brown taking the usual flak from Lucy. Indeed, if anyone ever makes a live-action version of "Peanuts," O'Donnell should be a shoo-in for the lead, together with Gary Oldman as Pigpen. So I long to know what stirred in the brains of the producers of "In Love and War" when they agreed that such good *cinematic manners*—the uninterrupted blandness of the O'Donnell style—would be ideally suited to the Great Bear of American letters. The casting is so wrong that it's very nearly inspired, like asking Arnold Schwarzenegger to front a new bio-pic of Swinburne. Attenborough's film is hardly an adult affair, since a strict rationing is applied to sex and violence, and his audience will presumably contain a number of children and teen-agers who have never heard of this guy Hemingway before, or who once skimmed a few chapters of "A Farewell to Arms." One wonders what on earth they will make of the movie, which basically offers a hello to hugs.

The year is 1918, and the young Ernest—he spends much of the movie being addressed as Kid—arrives in northern Italy as a Red Cross volunteer. He is supposed to lend his humanitarian services to the Italian troops in their fight against the Austrians, but, being Hemingway, he craves action: armed to the teeth with chocolate and cigarettes, he bicycles to the front line and promptly grabs his chance for heroism, hoisting up a wounded soldier and bearing him through gunfire and bursting shells. Our hero himself takes a bullet in the leg, and wakes up, as one does in these situations, to see the face of Sandra Bullock. She plays Agnes von Kurowsky, known as Aggie, who is one of a troop of American nurses. Her duties are first to tend her patient's injuries and then to fall in love with him, but Bullock boldly confuses the two: throughout the movie, she seems more tenderly inclined to the fate of his leg than to the rest of him. This leads to a wonderfully pointless exchange at the end, when they meet back in America. "How's your leg?" she asks. "Is that a personal or professional question?" Ernest replies.

Any complaints that there isn't much war to be had from "In Love and War"—Hemingway's early exploit is about the sum of it—should be balanced by the fact that there's not a whole lotta love, either. I had heard rumors of a lack of chemistry between the two stars, although one knows from long experience that this is a euphemism for the real dilemma, which is not enough physics. There's a distracted, slightly stupefied air to the lovers' embraces, and I wanted to read this as a premonition of parting—as the kind of passion that is resigned to its own snuffing out—but the more prosaic possibility is that Sandra Bullock simply couldn't work up the enthusiasm, and you can't blame her. When Aggie strolls around with Ernest, and even when she melts in his grasp, she has the look of a woman with something more important on her mind, like an enema to be administered on the other side of town. She is also flustered by the attentions of her Italian colleague, Dr. Caracciolo (Emilio Bonucci), who has nothing to recommend him except exquisite breeding, medical distinction, and a flunky-filled palazzo in the heart of Venice. No wonder she chooses the lunk with the limp from Kansas City.

The events that "In Love and War" recounts found their way into "A Farewell to Arms," published in 1929, and you can't help thinking that Attenborough might as well have filmed the novel, which first hit the screen in the Gary Cooper version of 1932. There would have been shape and stamina to such a project, whereas "In Love and War," with its vague determination to follow a true story, merely wanders around in circles, and its portrait of Hemingway softens and peels with damp. We are informed, excitingly, that he has "diarrhea of the mouth," but unless you count the word "Bastards!" he seems to have plugged the flow. This Hemingway is a clean and tidy soul. "You'll be making the old place spick-and-span while I write great works," he tells Aggie as he plans their future in America. Ah, the literary life! Hem was never quite as ruthless a writer as his fans make out, and most of his effects look pretty rusty by now (it's odd how the lust for plainness can turn precious), but there is certainly a beat of the hard heart in the early scenes of "A Farewell to Arms," when the hero tells Catherine that he adores her while admitting to the reader that he does no such thing. Compare the moment in Attenborough's movie when Hemingway boasts to Aggie, "Nobody will ever love anybody as much as I love you," and her smile fades as she realizes that, shucks, the boy *means* it.

In its assumption that bravado is never more than a cover for writhing emotions, "In Love and War" ignores the great Hemingway art of the lie, the skill with which he could bluster his way into bed—and, you might say, into a ready-mythified prose style. Any investigation of the man and his work (and his looks) must at some point measure the extent to which he was, in the deepest sense, all bull. But this movie has a sadder story to unfold. Its main contention is that the Hemingway of northern Italy turned into the Hemingway of legend, the veteran of brothel and fiesta, because he was ditched by Agnes von Kurowsky; that the hurt and shame toughened him like leather, and that "the kid he had been—eager, idealistic, and tender," as Aggie tells us, "lived on only in my heart." So now we know. If Sandra Bullock had pulled the curtains around the sickbed, ripped open Chris O'Donnell's pajamas, and given him her best shot, Ernest Hemingway would have ended up writing "The Bridges of Madison County." Too bad.



John Cleese and the cast of "A Fish Called Wanda" allotted new roles in a new plot.

ROBERT DE MICHIELI

"FIERCE CREATURES" stars John Cleese as Rollo Lee, a former policeman who is brought in to run a zoo and pull it into line with the demands of the parent company. The parent in question is Rod McCain (Kevin Kline), a carnivorous Australian magnate who bears absolutely no resemblance to Rupert Murdoch. Rod has a useless son, Vince (Kevin Kline again), who has a flirtatious associate named Willa (Jamie Lee Curtis). Add Michael Palin as one of the zookeepers and you have a full hand: the cast of "A Fish Called Wanda" allotted new roles in a new plot. "Wanda" was nothing special, but it was speedy and agreeable, whereas the new film, using the same ingredients, is a stinker.

There are two directors, Robert Young and Fred Schepisi, listed in the credits. My heart sank when I saw this, and, indeed, there are times in the movie when neither of them seems to be in charge. Characters swing from one attitude to the next without setting foot on anything as down-to-earth as a motive: Rollo shifts from a blistering, Basil Fawlty type to a hapless animal-lover, and at one point, without warning, he develops a case of malapropism just so that he can let slip some flaccid puns about Willa's breasts. There is a curious antiquarian feeling, in fact, to the whole leering enterprise: for want of anything better, it tries its hand at the kind of bedroom farce—girls in bra and knickers trapped in wardrobes—that was out of date on the London stage thirty years ago, and when Kevin Kline gazes at a tapir and says, "I have to say I've dated better-looking women," you know that you are in for a long haul. I felt sorry for Kline, who seems to sense the movie dying around him and hams it up wildly to try and kick the damn thing into life. No chance. I see that one of my fellow-sufferers has called this film "unrelentingly funny." I'm not sure about the funny part, but the rest is perfectly accurate. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

GIMME NO STATIC

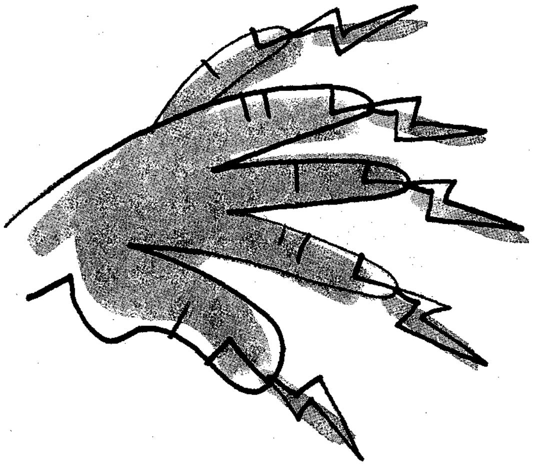
BY RICH COHEN

WHEN I heard that the explosion of Flight 800, from New York to Paris, might have been caused by a buildup of static electricity on one of the plane's fuel tanks, I said to myself, "I knew it!" Probably I'm not the only one who has feared and hated static electricity since youth, not the only one for whom a trip from sofa to light switch is a time of dead reckoning. When people try to tell me the good things about static electricity—how they can rub their feet on a shag rug and then shock friends or animals—I tell them this: You cannot control static electricity. You can only work with it for a time, the way F.D.R. worked with Stalin. But sooner or later, it will get you, too.

I could come up with a scientific explanation of static electricity, something sketched on a blackboard about polarity and electrons, but why should I? If you don't believe in static electricity, just go ahead and run your fingers along a television screen. That pleasant crackle is the enemy. And once you touch it you, too, are the enemy. You're carrying that spark with you the way Rosemary was hauling around Satan's baby.

Besides, if you ask a scientist about static, all he'll do is give you some mumbo-jumbo about its being an impersonal force of nature. It reminds me of the gangster in "The Godfather" saying it's "just business." Yeah, right! It's as personal as hell. Static holds a grudge. I sometimes think static is following me down the highway of life. One time, I crossed a room and reached to switch off the lights, and a veil of sparks leaped out and hugged my hand. For a moment, my hand was entirely blue. It was like a hand you see across a dark room, attached to someone else, floating. It was not even my hand. It was her hand now. Static's hand.

Why do some people court static electricity? Why do they rub their feet on floors until their fingertips dance like live wires? I have no idea, though I have to admit that sometimes, when I have nothing better to do, I fool static electricity into thinking she's got me. It's easy: just put on a *turtleneck*. Even a mock turtleneck. It's like trapping a lizard in a jar. Then, when I'm good and ready, I stand before a mirror in a dark room and rub my head. The charge fizzes up and out of my hair like carbonation in a glass. But I don't congratulate myself too much for this piece of bravery. I know the difference between a house pet and a wild animal.



In summer, when the thermometer goes above ninety and kids fill the trees with houses, I forget all about static electricity. It's as if it never happened. And then, right around this time of year, I feel the familiar charge on a pair of socks fresh out of the dryer, and think, You bastards. (Most of you know static electricity as static cling. Don't be fooled. Static cling is just one of the far-flung provinces of static electricity, a face the beast takes in daylight. It's an alias!) It comes back the way the Kellengers—a group of red-haired bullies who lived in my town, a bully for every grade, every jurisdiction—came back from camp each fall.

How, then, should we deal with static in our everyday lives? Well, let's start with static on airplanes, for what is an airplane if not a mile-high microcosm of America as a whole? For one thing, if you want to inflate a balloon on an airplane you'd better have a good reason. And even if you have a great reason you'd better not rub that balloon on your head and stick it to the ceiling. And if a representative of the airline can ask "Did you pack your own bags?" why can't he ask "When you last did a load of laundry, did you use Bounce, or a similar antistatic guard?" And surely a pilot can come on the P.A. system and tell passengers to keep their shoes on. The last thing we need is people walking up and down carpeted aisles in their socks. Another thing: no sweaters. Everyone knows about sweaters and static, how sweaters are to static as Qadaffi is to terrorism. If you must wear a sweater while travelling, wear a sweater vest—which, to make them more appealing to young people, we should call muscle sweaters.

Who knows? Maybe someone will one day get hit by a jolt of static big enough to transform him into a superhero. Staticman: cape, helmet, slipper socks. Probably not, though; static will very likely remain the bad news it is—a plague, a curse on the North. Of course, some profit by this. Some always do. The guy who invented fleece, the Hubble telescope of static attraction, must have had something up his sleeve, an agenda. Whoever this man is, I bet he lives deep underground, wears a suit made of rubber, and owns dozens of radios, all tuned to no station at all, the cool white noise of static filling every space in his bunker. When we are all shocked into submission, he will surface and take control of the world. ♦

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